VIOLENCE and TRUTH

DENIS VIDAL

Rajasthani Kingdom Confronts Colonial Authority

Violence and Truth demonstrates that colonialism not only imposed its own violence and ideology on Indian society but also led to a progressive redefinition of existing forms of violence and their interpretation at a local level. By documenting this process in the Rajasthani Kingdom of Sirohi, Denis Vidal invites us to reconsider prevalent models in the history and sociology of India. Exploring the diverse forms of protest favoured by different communities, including threats of suicide, armed rebellion and mass migration, he shows the central importance played by violence and the threat of violence in the organization of society. The book highlights the nature of the new modes of protest adopted by the population as older modes got discredited and some groups tried to escape marginalization by participating in the National Movement. The author argues that, in order to understand how Gandhian ideas were perceived and implemented locally, one must relate them to the debate about violence and truth that was going on at different levels of society.

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A Rajasthani Kingdom Confronts Colonial Authority

Denis Vidal

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In Memory
of
Pukhraj Singhi

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations used in the footnotes

C.O.L.	Collectorate Office Library, Sirohi*
I.O.L.	India Office Library, London
Eur. Mss.	European manuscripts
P.D.	Political Department
P.S.	Political Secretariat
R.A.	Rajputana Agency
S.S.A.	Sirohi State Affairs
N.A.I.	National Archives of India, Delhi
F.	Foreign Department
F.A.	Department of Foreign Affairs
F.P.	Foreign and Political Department
Pol.	Political Branch
R.A.O.	Rajputana Archives Office
S.	Sirohi

The following abbreviations refer to their administrative use in the documents.

f.	file
l.	letter
n.	number
Pros.	Proceedings
sr.	serial

* From the existing collection of the Collectorate Archives of the District Collector's Office, situated at the old palace of Sarup Singh of Sirohi. These archives have not been classified and, therefore not transferred to the State Library, Bikaner after Independence, with other royal archives. The documents are in a state of disorder, and references are often incomplete.

S.A.R.	State Archives of Rajasthan, Bikaner
S.P.	Sirohi Papers

Other Abbreviations

A.G.G.	Agent for the Governor General
C.M.	Chief Minister
H.H.	His Highness
P.A.	Political Assistant
P.S.	Political Secretary
R.R.	Resident for Rajputana
S.G.I.	Secretary to Government of India

Introduction

This study deals with a crucial period in the history of modern India, a time when increasing numbers of Indians were becoming conscious that under the impact of the colonial presence accepted values and familiar patterns of behaviour were gradually changing. I have attempted to understand how they reacted to this situation; how a few of them tried to regain control of a situation that seemed to be slipping out of their hands; and how they finally succeeded in beating the British at their own game – so that the colonizers, no longer sure of their ground, finally went back to where they had come from.

Readers should not however expect to find here a factual history of the Indian nationalist movement. Nor will they find an exhaustive analysis of the social structure of an Indian kingdom under British colonial rule. All this has already been attempted. The problem is that separating the study of history from the study of society is no more meaningful in India than anywhere else. Everything takes place within a whole that nothing can fully explain and no one can claim to be able to describe in its totality. So in this study my main attempt has been to avoid the traditional dividing lines behind which historians, sociologists and ethnographers have tended to entrench themselves.

On the basis of the history of one Indian kingdom, I have tried to analyse the reasons why a debate about the nature, use and legitimacy of violence became so widespread in Indian society in the first half of this century. For the fact that this debate was taking place explains the success and emblematic role of Gandhi in the years leading up to Independence, not the other way around. I also try to show that a deeper understanding of the nature of this debate and the factors it involved allows us to analyse some aspects of Indian society and history with greater clarity.

THE KINGDOM OF SIROHI

The small kingdom of Sirohi was dissolved only in 1950, when it was divided between the two recently-formed states of Rajasthan and Gujarat. This partition of the kingdom took place after a very heated controversy, which destroyed the political career of Gokulbhai Bhatt, an important leader in the Independence movement and a native of the kingdom. In 1956 however, following a readjustment of the borders of several states of the Indian Union, all the former territory of Sirohi was reunited into a single district and included in Rajasthan.

It was not so much the integrity of the old kingdom of Sirohi that was at stake however, but something much more highly valued by everyone, something which had been arousing greed of various kinds for centuries. This was a small range of hills whose height and form would probably have been of no interest to anyone, had Mount Abu, the last spur of the Aravalli range, not stood there like a vast isolated sentinel of rocks and forests, overlooking the first margins of the great Indian desert which stretches all the way to the Indus. A much-revered place of pilgrimage for the Jains, who have built dozens of white marble temples with magnificent stone-carvings there, Mount Abu is also the legendary homeland of the oldest Rajput dynasties of northern India, said to have been born from a sacrifice performed by the gods upon its summit. The mountain is also sacred to local tribal people, who regularly go there on pilgrimage. Mount Abu also became a favourite resort of the colonial administrators of the region; for as the highest point in western India it has a relatively pleasant climate during the hot summer months. So it is not surprising that after the departure of the British the state governments of Gujarat and Rajasthan competed to gain possession of the offices, bungalows, hospitals, schools, and of course the polo-field established by the colonizers. And it explains why Mount Abu, traditional refuge of ascetics, rebels and fugitive princes, and an important and particularly well-fortified strategic site, was always the most prized possession of the Rajput dynasties that reigned over Sirohi for several hundred years.

Mount Abu was the main prize for which the Rajputs of this region challenged each other over the centuries; and it was the centre from which the kingdom gradually extended over time.

Not so very far however, for there is probably no point in Sirohi from which Mount Abu cannot be seen. This little kingdom always had difficulty in maintaining its autonomy, wedged as it was between two of the most powerful states of Rajasthan, Mewar (Udaipur) and Marwar (Jodhpur). So it was a great step when in 1405 a ruler of Abu dared to found his new capital at Sirohi, close to the present town of this name, about 60 kilometres away from the prestigious peak.

Sirohi, like most of the other old settlements in the kingdom, owed its (very relative) prosperity to the fact that it lay on the network of caravan routes making up one of the most important commercial axes in North India, linking the Gujarat coast with the Indo-Gangetic plain. This most probably explains the presence and importance of a Jain merchant community in the kingdom from a very early date.[1] Archaeology has also confirmed the existence of some very ancient towns, now abandoned, in the foothills of Mount Abu.[2] Apart from the capital however, development of the other four or five small towns in existence today took place much more recently, and was connected with the colonial presence in the region. For instance Erimpura (now renamed Sheoganj), owed its earlier name to the Irish origin of the first Commander-in-Chief of the military garrison stationed there under British command; while Abu Road owes its growth to the railway and the irreverent usage made of Mount Abu by the British. The rest of the population of the district is distributed between four to five hundred villages (a number which has hardly changed in more than a century). These are very different, depending on whether they are situated in the predominantly tribal hilly areas in the east of the district, in the better irrigated valleys in the centre of it, or further west in semi-desert.

Rajput warriors and castes associated with priesthood held the highest rank in the kingdom, as was usual in India. Jains were also important, but did not have equal status. The castes of traders and craftsmen, cultivators and herders constituted an intermediate strata; while castes occupied with 'impure' tasks (dismembering

[1] See R.V. Somani 1982.
[2] See K.C. Jain 1972.

animal carcasses, leather-work, laundry, etc.) stood at the bottom of the social hierarchy. There was also a sizeable tribal population, whose special status in some respects resembled that of the Rajputs, and in others that of the lower castes. It should also be noted that only a very small proportion of the population belonged to castes specializing in agriculture.[3]

Levels of Interdependence

Some events which took place in Sirohi between 1920 and 1950 cast a rather unexpected light on Indian society. They highlight traditions which although not always ignored are rarely given central importance. There are several reasons for this, mainly connected with established research orientations. Long after Independence, perceptions of Indian society remained deeply influenced by perspectives left over from the colonial era. In the case of Rajasthan, stress continued to be laid upon institutions and traditions characteristic of the Rajput princely states. To the colonial authorities anything that did not fit in with the established order in these kingdoms was considered with suspicion, as a potential source of political disorder and social instability. This applied especially to nomadic and 'tribal' populations, but also to all traditions which set limits to established authority by allowing some play in the relations between the various elements of society.

The best anthropological and sociological studies have tried to lessen the ethnocentricity of the classifications used during the colonial period. Paradoxically however, these attempts have sometimes only strengthened existing preconceptions. For example, while attempting to gain a better understanding of the ideological and institutional forces at work in the Hindu kingdom, the caste system, or the *jajmani* revenue distribution system, emphasis was laid on principles derived from brahminical ideology. But these do not always reflect the actual workings of society.[4] Rather, they tend to reflect those aspects which got integrated into the colonial order.[5]

[3] For more information about Sirohi, see B.N. Dhoundiyal 1967.

[4] For example, present-day historians have shown that a significant proportion of agricultural production must have been monetarized from a very early date; at least this was clearly the case in Rajasthan from the seventeenth century onwards. See S.P. Gupta 1986.

[5] See C. Bayly 1988, Chapter 5.

More recently, stress has been laid (especially by historians) on social groups and events which reveal more about the tensions and contradictions within the society. But the question remains: must we really see these as the inevitable effects of domination within a society whose overall structure is already familiar to us? Shouldn't we first admit that we need to reconsider the premises on which we have been basing our understanding of Indian society?

In this study I would like to show that an analysis of events that might seem circumstantial or marginal can lead us to question accepted views about the balances of power underlying Indian society. I shall suggest that the caste system could function only because of a complex of interdependencies and power relationships working through specific traditions by which sets of values were repeatedly put to the test and redefined. Examining particular cases, I shall show that tribal rebellions, revolts of nobles, threats to migrate from less violent communities, and threats of collective suicide from Brahmins and bards were not only anecdotal. Such traditional patterns of protest played an important part in regulating the way society functioned. It will then appear that these traditions were based on an overall notion of social order very different from the one that gradually replaced it as a result of colonization. If we take them into account, we gain a different perspective on the long-drawn-out debate which opposes analyses of Indian society based on the concept of caste to other interpretations that rely on the notion of class or social stratification. In contrast to the harmonious picture often presented by caste-based interpretations, conflict and contradiction did often arise within the traditional structures of Indian society; but these conflicts and contradictions frequently took specific forms which cannot be reduced to the usual categories of Western sociology.

Classifications inherited from the colonial period had the effect of fragmenting attempts to understand Indian society. Focussing on 'castes', 'tribes' or 'village communities', each component of society was studied as a separate entity with its own characteristic features. Similarly, the distinctive culture of the Indian subcontinent was broken up into a multitude of separate layers and elements. The merit of the anthropology and sociology of recent decades has been to show how artificial such divisions often are,

and to adopt a more holistic view of Indian civilization. Louis Dumont, for instance, attempted to define the structural features which in his view determined the sociology and ideology of the Indian subcontinent as a whole.[6] As one of the most distinctive characteristics of this civilization is supposed to be the caste system, it is not surprising that he devoted much attention to the ideology underlying it.

Up to the 1970s the study of Indian society was dominated by the work of sociologists and anthropologists; but over the last thirty years historians have been more active. This is particularly true of the modern history of India, which has benefited from a significant amount of innovative research.[7] That the history of the colonial period has been profoundly reassessed can be seen for instance from Sumit Sarkar's synthesis of this new research.[8]

One of the most important trends in this historiography for the colonial period has been that expressed in *Subaltern Studies*, from which numerous monographs as well as half a dozen collective publications have now emerged.[9] One merit of these works is that they have underlined the complexity of the historical events which led up to Indian Independence. This was made possible by the deliberate decision to extend enquiry to the strata of the population previously often disregarded by historians on account of their subaltern or marginal position in society. As a result the challenge to anthropology and sociology today is quite different from what it was just after Independence. Institutions and ideologies indicating homogeneity, continuity and stability are relatively better understood. But this should not be allowed to obstruct our understanding of social dynamics and put anthropology and sociology in danger of falling back into their old essentialist tendency.[10] It is sufficient to mention the pioneering work of Bernard Cohn and all those more or less directly influenced by him, or of a historian such as Christopher Bayly, to confirm that there is a path which neither sacrifices history to sociology, nor sociology to history.[11]

[6] L. Dumont 1979.

[7] For a critical account of this development in historiography, by one of the historians who directly contributed to it, see for example B. Stein 1990.

[8] S. Sarkar 1983.

[9] See R. Guha (ed.) 1982–8.

[10] On the charge of orientalism, see R. Inden 1990.

[11] B. Cohn 1987; C. Bayly 1983. Apart from the historians associated with

When physicists set up experimental apparatus to obtain a better understanding of the internal structure of the nucleus of the atom, they made a discovery which surprised them. They had supposed that the nucleus was made up of two types of particles: neutrons and protons. But by making neutrons and protons collide with each other at high speeds, they discovered dozens and dozens of new particles. As a result of these experiments, no physicist can now declare with certitude that he understands exactly what is going on inside an atomic nucleus, exactly what forces and elements are interacting and what principles are involved. But this has not prevented physicists from forming theories that enable them to understand in some detail what is happening beyond the atomic level. And they can calculate, without difficulty and to a high degree of precision, the consequences of most of these phenomena.[12]

Of course this is only a metaphor; but I believe it is possible to draw a parallel between the situation of theoretical physics in 1965 as described by Richard Feynman, and the present situation in sociological analysis of the caste system. Despite all local and regional variations in this system throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, a certain number of common features allow us a superficial understanding of its main characteristics: endogamy, commensality, status-hierarchy, etc. On the other hand, as soon as we try to understand the internal principles, the traditions, the interdependence networks, the power relationships, which actually shaped various social and cultural logics from within, we soon find ourselves on *terra incognita*, where everything is yet to be discovered.

The history of modern India presents us with the equivalent of the physicists' experimental apparatus, and reveals, in the form of local and unique events, the equivalent of those new particles and unexpected findings. They show us institutions that were superficially familiar in a new light, and oblige us to look for a new approach. For as Feynman points out:

One way of arresting the progress of research would be to conduct experiments only in those areas in which we are familiar with scientific

Subaltern Studies, other investigators too have preferred to take their stand on the shared borderline of history and anthropology; see, for instance, J. Pouchepadass 1986; N. Dircks 1987; D. Kolff 1990.

[12] See R. Feynman 1970.

laws. But researchers tend to put all their efforts into conducting experiments in those domains where it is most likely that we will be able to prove the falsity of our theories. In other words we try to prove that we have erred as quickly as possible because that is the only way to progress.[13]

Like many others I believe that it is by studying history that we can most quickly find out where we have gone wrong and what we have overlooked so far in the sociology of India. That is why my aim in this study has not been exactly that of a historian, nor of a sociologist. I have simply tried to analyse some local and more or less ephemeral configurations and structures which I hope reveal some interesting facts about the social setting in which they occurred.

Forces at Play

We have got used to thinking that one of the fundamental principles of Hindu ideology was the complementarity of Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Brahmins, with the highest social status, were considered to embody the socio-cosmic order *(dharma);* while Kshatriyas, as warriors, held the reins of power. Rituals associated with kingship in Rajasthan often confirm this. But can we conclude that this complementarity was really the principle on which the existing order was founded?

Consider the example of Sirohi. The most decisive factor in the history of this kingdom, as we have already pointed out, was probably its geographical situation, being situated on one of the most important commercial routes in India. The prosperity of the local merchant community always depended on links with the commercial networks of the subcontinent. And the dynasties of warrior-clans that ruled over this territory always owed a large part of their revenue to this situation. There is evidence of this from the seventeenth century onwards. In one of the first available testimonies, a minister of Sirohi explains to an emissary of Nainsi, the great seventeenth century historian, the importance of customs duties on goods to the revenues of the Rao.[14] In contrast, it is remarkable to note how little cultivated land, and even less

[13] Ibid., p. 192.

[14] See R.K. Qanungo 1969:88.

irrigated land, figures in the early statistics at our disposal. And one of the striking features of the social structure of the kingdom has always been the very low proportion of its population who would define themselves as belonging to agricultural castes.[15] So one of the most important privileges of the local authorities was always the right to tax merchants passing through. This right was claimed not only by the ruler, but also by local nobles (Thakurs), as well as by tribal groups, for the territories under their control. And conflicts arose constantly; for since the right to levy taxes normally entailed a corresponding guarantee of safe passage, the question was always whether the parties who demanded this right would in fact be able to provide this guarantee or not.

In order to understand the logic on which the existence of the kingdom depended for so long, we must therefore take into account, in addition to pressures from external authorities, the whole complex of relationships between these merchants and all those who were in a position to hinder or further their activities: that is, not just the ruler, but also Thakurs and tribals. The prosperity of the kingdom must have directly depended on this precarious coexistence of traders and warriors. And the conditions required to maintain this coexistence were as fundamental as, for example, the agrarian relationships between landowners and cultivators. For if this coexistence was threatened, local agricultural production was insufficient to provide an alternative source of revenue, being itself seriously affected by any instability, as the history of the kingdom at the beginning of the nineteenth century shows. It is true however that social disorders must have affected some groups in the kingdom less directly: for example, the herding communities (Rabari or Rebari). This explains their relatively large numbers in an area whose history has been marked by troubled times as much as by periods of peace.

It has also been argued that rivalries between merchant and warrior-castes, or even within warrior-castes for the control of power, had little effect on the fundamental hierarchy of social values. For after all they involved only economics and politics – activities supposedly assigned a secondary place in the ideology

[15] Farming castes such as Kumbi and Patels constituted not even ten per cent of the population in the first half of this century, if we can credit the gazetteers. However, this percentage does not correspond to the proportion of the population actually engaged in some form of agricultural activity.

of Hinduism. But another characteristic feature of the region makes us doubt this. This is the outstanding role played by bards (Charan), who had the responsibility of commemorating the exploits of Rajputs. Charans performed a crucial function in the network of relationships we have referred to: they used to guarantee the safety of caravans with their own lives. They also acted as messengers between the ruler and the tribals, and as go-betweens during uprisings by nobles, when their villages were normally considered inviolable sanctuaries where the rebels could leave their families and possessions in safety. Lastly, in their narratives and poems they would transform what were often only petty power struggles, pillaging expeditions and sometimes fratricidal combats, into set-pieces of valour, lauding the noble qualities of the protagonists.

All this gives us a picture of society and kingship in this area of Rajasthan that is rather different from the one usually presented by historiography under colonial influence. In this new picture the bards appear as the real ideologues, enabling merchants to capitalize profits by spreading their goods, and at the same time enabling Rajputs to capitalize their power by spreading news of their exploits. We have several indications of the importance of this process. It cannot be mere chance that the original capital of the kingdom of Marwar, one of the most powerful in the area, was the small town of Pali, which for a long time was a very important caravan stage, midway between Gujarat and Delhi and Agra. Nor that in Bikaner, another great kingdom of the area, the tutelary deity of the ruler is a goddess associated with the Charan caste.

If real power in Rajasthan has in fact often depended on the conjunction of two factors: the control of territory and the circulation of wealth, it is not difficult to understand why this dimension was so often distorted by the British. For this was also essentially their own approach to problems, right up to the second half of the twentieth century. They constantly had to ask themselves how far they needed to control the territory of the subcontinent in order to be able to exploit, to their own advantage, the circulation of wealth. Moreover this problem had been familiar to the Moguls before them.[16]

[16] In 1657, for example, Prince Murad curtly informed the Rao of Sirohi that it would be in his interests to swiftly redress the fault of his Thakurs who had

In Sirohi the most important responsibility of the British Political Residents was to guarantee safety of passage through the kingdom. Similarly, one of the main concerns of the colonial administration was to see that taxes levied by local chieftains on merchandise in transit were regulated. In time, the effect of colonization was to delink the two fundamental elements whose conjunction had characterized local society. On one hand the warrior groups (Rajputs and tribals) were comparatively marginalized, while the British tried to integrate them into the armed forces of the Empire. On the other, the Marwaris, the trading castes of Rajasthan, got included, at least at first, in the new commercial and financial networks established in British India. No longer able to interfere in inter-regional trade, groups which had traditionally resorted to the use of force had no other choice than to fall back on defending their established privileges relating to land revenue. It was in the course of this process that most of the events described in this book occurred.

Traditional Modes of Resistance

When looking at a society with a fragile social balance, in which recourse to intimidation or force was common, it makes sense to classify the castes and communities of the kingdom according to their traditional relationship to the use of violence. In fact this was done by the pre-colonial authorities, who distinguished between groups in the kingdom who would take up arms in self-defence or to assert their rights, and ones who normally would not do so. The first category included Rajputs and tribals.[17] This

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cheated an Imperial official, by punishing him severely and reimbursing, if necessary on his own account, the sum that had been misappropriated: 'On such acts your loyalty is judged, and on them your good fortune depends, any delay will be reported to the Emperor and its repentance will be in vain'. After this, Shah Jahan issued a *firman* in which the emperor's requirements were reiterated: 'The *jagir* of this place has been granted to you in order that such incidents should not occur, and that men can travel in safety. It is also desired that in future you should pay great attention to State administration, aware that as our vassal you need fear no interference from anyone in your *jagir*'. L.S. Ram 1920:203–4.

[17] The term 'tribals', which is very controversial from a sociological point of view, is used for communities originally labelled as such by the colonial

did not mean that the rest of the population was unarmed. With the possible exception of the Jains, no one was unarmed. But these other communities knew that the balance of force would rapidly go against them, when confronted with people more resolutely violent than themselves. So they frequently faced the alternative of either accepting the protection of the ruler, local nobles or tribals, in their respective domains and territories; or simply threatening to leave the locality if they came into conflict with their 'protectors' of the moment. And contrary to what we might suppose, this was far from being an empty threat. Brahmins, genealogists (Bhats) and bards (Charans), however, were a special case. Their status gave them a certain immunity, which was more or less widely respected and which they took advantage of in their own ways.

In order to gain a better understanding of developments which occurred at the beginning of this century therefore, we ought to take a look at the various traditional modes of resistance to which people might take recourse; for these figured in all the events which characterize the colonial period almost up to Independence. We shall find that in spite of their obvious diversity, these forms of resistance have several features in common. The decision to resist, for example, was usually taken collectively, after discussion by the elders of the community or the leaders of a clan. There were various stages of escalation in the means of pressure used. A clear warning would normally precede any resort to action. When nobles or tribals threatened to revolt, when bards or Brahmins threatened to commit suicide, or other castes to migrate, their psychology might be summed up as, 'Stop me or I shall do something dreadful'. And this was the feature that clearly distinguished such courses from ordinary banditry or spontaneous violence: the other party had to be given time and opportunity to reconsider his behaviour and to act accordingly.

In their own eyes, these courses of action in no way undermined the 'right' of those who undertook them. It was just because of a sense of their legitimate rights and respective statuses that nobles would rebel, tribals would revolt, bards would threaten to take their own lives, or other groups to emigrate. Their own statements

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authorities, which have retained the same label in modern India. In Sirohi, these are mainly Bhils, Minas and Girasias.

clearly show that by rebelling they were calling on the ruler, the local nobles or the government to think again and acknowledge that they had been ill-advised or mistaken, and after all behave as true authorities, respecting the rights of their subjects. The very fact of resorting to extreme measures, with all the sacrifices this entailed, was considered both as the ultimate proof of their rights, and as a demonstration of their determination to have these rights acknowledged. We could not be further from the truth if we considered, as the British invariably did, that all acts of resistance on the part of the populace were either impulsive and unreflecting, or simply criminal. In one sense however the English were not completely wrong; but not for the reasons that they thought. There really was a new factor which radically undermined the logic of such acts and obscured their implications. This factor was the colonial presence itself; for the new norms and values which this brought into play changed the rules of the game more and more drastically.

The Impact of Colonialism

The British reacted quite consistently to these traditional forms of resistance. They were ready to discuss the grounds for them; in most cases, they acknowledged the soundness of the reasons that had led this or that individual, this or that community to rebel. But they were always unshakeable in their condemnation of the means of resistance adopted. For example, they readily accepted that the grounds motivating a large-scale tribal revolt of 1922 in Sirohi were largely justified. But, as I shall show, this did not prevent them from repressing this movement with the greatest severity.

The combination of these two attitudes was in fundamental contradiction to the expectations of the local people. They were rebelling precisely in order to obtain acknowledgement of claims they believed to be legitimate. They took it for granted that if the justice of their claims were admitted, the manner in which they had been obliged to act in order to convince the authorities of them could not justifiably be condemned. If anyone was to be blamed, it should be those who had forced them to take recourse to such extreme measures.

This becomes especially clear where the nobles were involved.

Their testimonies show how insignificant they considered the acts of violence committed in the course of their rebellions. They felt that they themselves had grounds for complaint, because they had been obliged to live as outlaws in order to make their rights prevail. But although the British sometimes acknowledged that the nobles might indeed suffer injury as a result of the often cavalier behaviour of the rulers of Sirohi, they nevertheless always pressed to have them condemned as severely as possible for the actions they had been guilty of as rebels.

When faced with traditional ways of expressing and settling conflicts in local society, the British disregarded their official policy of non-interference, and instead brought all their influence to bear on the local administrations, and would even actively intervene alongside them, in order to implement a policy that can be summed up in two points: first, to systematically oppose the traditional means of pressure used by the populace; and secondly, to redefine the principles and procedures used to determine the rights of each party.

As regards the first point, the various forms of resistance used by all the different groups were stigmatized as 'criminal'. The English insisted for example, that nobles were responsible in the eyes of the law for all actions committed in revolt. And it was their general policy to label most 'tribal' communities with a collective 'criminal' status. In addition they pressed for threats of suicide by Charans or Brahmins to be considered as crimes and severely punished.

Historians of law have shown how this policy led the colonial authorities to formulate legislation that deviated from the fundamental principles of Western law.[18] But here we want to stress that this legislation was even more fundamentally alien to local custom and practice. The simple fact of condemning all forms of violence, whoever the perpetrator or victim might be, did not in itself appeal to notions that had no equivalent in India. Jainism is the best evidence for this, with its fundamental doctrine of absolute respect for all forms of life. But this was a matter of options specific to particular individuals, sects, castes or communities. No one expected such rules to apply to every aspect of social life. Actual practice was based on an almost opposite

[18] See A.A. Yang (ed.) 1985.

postulate: the gravity of an act of violence was invariably assessed according to who committed it and against whom. This principle was exactly what Brahmins and Charans were appealing to when they threatened to take their own lives.

The corollary of this policy of 'criminalization' by the British was equally significant. We shall see that whether it was a matter of rulers, nobles or tribals, both their status and the forms of their autonomy and sovereignty were based on balances of power which could always be challenged, despite traditions of compromise and mutual accommodation which seemed to be guaranteed by established custom. Yet the British not only illegalized the trials of strength by which inter-communal relationships were often defined, but also tried to ensure that the relationships themselves were redefined. As a result even today many studies of the sociology or history of this region echo issues that have arisen from this effort to fit into a historiography, ethnography and jurisprudence of a Western type, claims which in earlier times were advanced in a very different way.

Debating Violence

It is clear that local groups did not remain unaffected by the new situation imposed upon them. Or rather, it would be clear, if it were possible to discern a common reaction from all the local people involved. What we actually observe is somewhat different. In all cases where sufficient documentation is available, what emerges is rather the diversity of ways in which people reacted, in the new historical context created by the colonial presence. Some continued to use their old forms of resistance; others began to change their methods more or less radically when dealing with the local authorities or the British.

The Charans are a case in point. They were not only bards to the Rajputs, but also functioned as guardians of the collective memory and of truth. They would stand surety with their own lives to all sorts of transactions where they were called in as witnesses. Just as a new historiography was replacing the historical traditions they were responsible for maintaining, so too a new kind of law was being established under British influence which left them no part to play. A whole spectrum of traditional relationships to memory and truth got modified, as the definition of those

who had previously been recognized as their legitimate guardians was gradually changed. The same applied to the Brahmins, Thakurs or tribals: it was not only their specific interests which were challenged, but also the whole foundation on which their collective identity rested; and as a result, some underlying supports of local culture were weakened.

The documentation shows us that everyone was fully aware of this. And it is not a matter of chance that it was the communities most affected by this process – whatever their status in local society and whatever divergences there may have been between their distinctive ethos and the ideals proclaimed by Gandhi – who proved most active at the beginning of the 1920s, when the nationalist movement began to spread and make an impact on society as a whole throughout the Indian subcontinent.

THE RELEVANCE OF GANDHISM

No one can seriously doubt the importance of Gandhi's personal charisma in the Indian nationalist movement. Of course we can also attribute his ascent to pre-eminence in the Congress party and nationalist circles to other qualities such as political and organizational ability, etc.[19] But such explanations fail to account for how and why his influence spread so rapidly beyond those circles. Awareness of this problem has often led historians to appeal to other levels of explanation; in class terms for historians of the Marxist school, or for others, insistence that Gandhi's real genius lay in finding the way to transcribe the aspiration for independence of a cultivated minority into an idiom that was accessible to all, by appealing to values that were fundamental to Indian culture.

And yet one feels that such interpretations, in spite of the elements of truth they may contain, remain unsatisfying. For example, one oft-debated question is whether Gandhi's ideals really did echo established values of Indian culture. Even if they did, it is difficult to see this as a sufficient explanation for his success. For Gandhi was certainly not the only nationalist leader of the times who attempted to 'transcribe' the ideals of a minority into a traditional idiom accessible to all. This would apply equally

[19] See J. Brown 1990.

to Sri Aurobindo, to Shraddhananda, and other less well-known nationalist leaders.[20] Above all, this line of argument loses force when we examine in detail what happened locally during the decisive years when Gandhi's importance in the Independence struggle was on the rise. One fact is well established nowadays: the Non-Cooperation Movement would never have become so widespread if it had been only a mobilization from above.[21] Not only did very varied initiatives arise at every level of society in response to the appeal of the Congress leaders, but even more, in many cases the only role left to Gandhi and other nationalist militants was to try to channel a movement that was beyond their control. It has been noted moreover, that there was always a considerable discrepancy between Gandhi himself (and the line of action he advocated) and local perceptions of him.[22] The analyses which follow will confirm this. They will also show the full extent of the divergence between the overall aims of the 1922 movement, and what actually happened at the local level.

On the other hand, everyone knows that the distinctive characteristic of Gandhi was to link his political activity with an uncompromising denunciation of all use of violence in society. This led him to give primary importance in political action to a strong demand for moral reform, advocating the non-violent methods of resistance which are still associated with his name. The questions which Gandhi raised about the uses of violence and of truth in certain circumstances of collective life were more than just a debate between militants about the means – pacifist or non-pacifist, legal or illegal – of achieving independence for the country. Nor did these questions simply echo ethical issues. In fact they formed part of a much wider debate which was taking place throughout Indian society at this time – a debate arising from the colonial challenge to uses that had been made of violence and truth in contexts that were crucial for the normal functioning of society. So it may be easier for us to understand the first impact of Gandhism if we realize that it directly echoed problems and questions which most people were facing at the

[20] On the differences between Gandhi and the upholders of a more traditional form of Hinduism, see A. Nandy 1980.

[21] See the numerous analyses in R. Guha (ed.) 1982–8.

[22] See S. Amin 1984.

time. Understanding how it corresponded to the concerns of ordinary people, and what exactly these concerns were, seems to me to be an essential task, if we wish to understand the relevance of Gandhism in India.

1

Simplifying History

'A Perfect Desert'

During the half century before the British arrived in the area (1778–1822), the armies of Marwar conducted no less than seventeen devastating expeditions into the kingdom of Sirohi.[1] Unlike Sirohi, Marwar was one of the most powerful kingdoms in Rajasthan. Its ruler controlled a large part of the arid region extending eastward from the Indus valley and south-west of the Indo-Gangetic plain. The annals[2] recount that Man Singh, the Raja of Jodhpur, had vowed revenge against Sirohi. He had his reasons for this. When Man Singh was still only a claimant for the throne and being pursued by more adversaries, the Raja of Sirohi had refused to receive his wife and son when they came seeking refuge in his territory. This young son fell ill and lost the sight of one eye in the course of this journey around the frontiers of the kingdom.[3] When Man Singh finally succeeded in seizing the throne of Jodhpur, he waited for an opportunity to take his revenge. This came a few years later when Udaibhan, the new ruler of Sirohi, passed through Marwar territory on his way home from Benares, where he had gone to scatter his father's ashes in the Ganges. Man Singh took him prisoner. He was finally released on the promise of a considerable ransom. But once back in Sirohi, Udaibhan refused to fulfil his obligations. This gave Man Singh the excuse he had been waiting for. The Marwar armies developed the habit of devastating Sirohi territory at regular intervals over the next few decades. The capital was sacked several times

[1] I.O.L., W.H. Miles, Eur. Mss., f.73.

[2] The only existing history of Sirohi was compiled by Pandit Gauri Shankar Ojha at the request of the ruler, Keshri Singh: G.S. Ojha 1911. There is a version of this in English, also prepared by order of Keshri Singh: L.S. Ram 1920.

[3] N.A.I., F.P., n. 810–12, 1818.

and the palace set on fire; the ruler left it and took refuge on Mount Abu. The Marwar armies burnt and pillaged the villages, extorting tribute after tribute from the population. The Raja's resentment was not the only motive for this. The policy followed by Man Singh was one method, quite acceptable at the period,[4] of refilling the coffers of his kingdom and at the same time providing booty for his armies.[5]

So the kingdom underwent a long period of upheaval. The nobles, far from trying to put an end to it, took advantage of the situation to strengthen their own autonomy, denying the ruler the rights and revenues due to him, and annexing villages from his domains. When a noble died without a direct heir, it was his relatives, not the sovereign, who decided on his successor. Some nobles transferred their allegiance to rulers of neighbouring kingdoms.[6] The Thakur of Nibaj, for example, one of the principal nobles, went so far as to ally himself with the Raja of Marwar, the sworn enemy of the ruler of Sirohi. During this period, the latter was putting pressure on his subjects, trying to extort from them the money that had been demanded to appease the Raja of Marwar. And to this dark picture we must also add a resurgence of banditry, contributed to by rebellious nobles as well as tribal groups living in the nearby hills.

A result of this disorder was mass emigration of the population to other kingdoms, much land was left fallow, and many villages were deserted. Members of the merchant community were obvious targets, both for raiding parties from outside the kingdom, and for the ruler and nobles of Sirohi. Most of them preferred to go into exile.[7] Finally some nobles succeeded in forming an alliance to depose and imprison the ruler, replacing him by his brother, who had joined their cause.

[4] See also the excellent monograph of D. Kolff 1990.

[5] On the difficulties experienced by the Rajput states in the second half of the eighteenth century due to increased military expenditures, see G.S.L. Devra 1991.

[6] In a petition addressed to the English in 1832, the Maharao stated that 312 villages had been separated from Sirohi and included in the neighbouring kingdom of Palampur between 1768 and 1823. It was decided that this question would be considered only for villages which had been included in this kingdom since 1817. L.S. Ram 1920:233.

[7] According to a report of 1855, 1886 Jain families went into exile during the reign of Udaibhan Singh. N.A.I., R.A.S., f.n. 39 of 1855.

This period in Sirohi exemplifies how the fundamental bonds of solidarity on which the socio-political equilibrium of such kingdoms depended could be temporarily disrupted: the ruler turns against the merchants of his own kingdom, and abandons his capital and villagers to the mercy of enemy armies; most of the population then leaves the area; and finally nobles and other important citizens, at least those not trying to exploit the situation to their own advantage, join together against the ruler and finally succeed in deposing him.

But it was still necessary to protect Sirohi against the Raja of Jodhpur, who now cynically decided to restore the former ruler to the throne, in order to be able to do as he wished in the kingdom. It was in this troubled context that representatives were sent to Udaipur to request protection from the British,[8] as most other Rajput states in the area had already done, with the aim of conciliating the increasingly powerful successor to the Moguls, and of gaining protection against the exactions of their neighbours or the Marathas. James Tod welcomed them.

A Particular Point of View

Amongst the Englishmen who created the British Empire in India, James Tod has a special place.[9] This is due less to his talents as geographer, postmaster, administrator and soldier, than to his work as a historian; and above all to the enthusiasm with which he made himself a spokesman for the Hindu kingdoms of Rajasthan. Nothing sums up this curious passion better than a sentence from the introduction to his last book: 'Providence has placed me in a situation to dispense benefits, not to individuals but to petty kingdoms'.[10]

James Tod was born in England in 1772. According to his biographer, he was supposed to become a merchant. But he refused this conventional destiny. Instead he joined the Royal

[8] On the establishment of colonial authority in Rajasthan, see E.S. Haynes 1975.
[9] For a detailed and insightful discussion of James Tod's work in relation to nineteenth-century orientalist discourse and its contemporary critique, see N. Peabody (1996), Tod's Rajasthan and the Boundaries of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-century India. *Modern Asian Studies*, 30:1, which appeared after the completion of this manuscript.
[10] J. Tod 1839:3.

Navy, as novels of the time advised in such a case. He arrived in India in 1799 at the age of seventeen and joined a Company regiment. In 1806 he was attached to the British Political Resident at the court of Scindia, in a military capacity.[11] The Maratha ruler had set up camp at Udaipur, in the devastated capital of Mewar. This kingdom, even in its weakened condition, was still the most prestigious Rajput state in north India, because of its exemplary resistance to the advance of Mogul power. Tod followed the itinerant court of Scindia for six years. Then from 1812 he lived for five years in Gwalior, where the Maratha ruler had finally decided to establish his capital. There James Tod took up a civilian post, becoming first the second and then the chief assistant to the Political Resident.

Throughout all this first period, Tod devoted himself to studying Rajasthan. Although he could not travel freely, he did have the opportunity to explore parts of the region, both in the course of short tours, described in detail in his writings, and while accompanying the court of Scindia as it shifted from place to place. He also financed small expeditions, carried out by local people he had trained, who collected all sorts of information in the course of journeys he mapped out for them. In addition he would summon natives of all parts of the region and question them untiringly:

> From these remote regions, the best informed native inhabitants were, by persuasion and recompense, conducted to me, and I could at all times, in the Mahratta camp at Gwalior from 1812 to 1817, have provided a native of the valley of Indus, the deserts of Dhat and Oomrasoomra, or any of the States of Rajasthan.[12]

In 1817, under the influence of Hastings, the new Viceroy, the British resumed their expansionist policy in the subcontinent. By disrupting the *status quo* they had maintained for a time, they soon found themselves in direct confrontation with the Marathas, and then became involved in a military campaign to suppress the Pindaris.[13] It was in the course of this campaign that Tod was first

[11] The classic work of colonial historiography on the Marathas was edited by J. Grant-Duff 1971. For a first reassessment, see S.N. Sen 1928; and for more recent analyses, see S. Gordon 1993; F. Perlin 1985 and A. Wink 1986.
[12] J. Tod 1839:XXI.
[13] For a contemporary account of the Pindaris, see J. Malcolm 1972. 'Pindari'

able to apply the knowledge that he had accumulated. His competence had so far led to little more than him becoming the chief postmaster of Rajasthan. He set up (at least according to his biographer, for I have found hardly any confirmation of this) a sort of military information service that was valuable to the English in this region which was still quite unfamiliar to them and which they had not yet mapped:

> The information and intelligence which he was thus enabled to contribute so opportunely for his country's service were mostly derived from a system organized, at his own private expense, for the collection of geographical, statistical and archaeological knowledge, wholly foreign to his official duties. Every day, during this campaign, he had then from ten to twenty written reports, from where he extracted bulletins he sent to the headquarters of every division.[14]

In 1817, after the British had won their war against the Marathas, James Tod became the first Political Agent for the Hindu kingdoms of western Rajasthan. He was responsible for Mewar, Bundi, Kota, Jaisalmer, and Sirohi, and for a short time in 1819 for Marwar too. At this time he returned to Udaipur; but unlike his situation a few years earlier, he was now no longer working with the Marathas, but at the court of the Hindu ruler. He directed his efforts towards re-establishing the diminished powers of the small rulers of the area, and encouraging a new prosperity in their kingdoms, within the framework of alliances with the British.

But his excessive enthusiasm for the cause of these kingdoms, and especially his continual interventions – which contradicted the principles he himself advocated – both irritated the local courts and made him suspect in the eyes of the colonial authorities. Added to this was his rivalry with General David Ochterlony, another colourful figure in the story of British expansion in India.

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was a portmanteau expression introduced by the British, which covered all sorts of armed bands scattered over central India and Rajasthan who continued to obstruct the establishment of colonial rule after the Marathas had been neutralized. The people referred to by this name, made the target of a real military campaign, were from varied backgrounds: irregulars of various origins (Afghan, Rajput, etc.), but also local people who had taken up arms to defend their rights or interests. To understand the context of this campaign, one must turn to the work of D. Kolff 1990, although unfortunately he makes no direct reference to the Pindaris.

[14] J. Tod 1839:XXVIII.

The General succeeded in getting Tod disavowed by his superiors, before himself suffering the same fate a few years later. Tod was practically accused of having accepted bribes from local rulers, and gradually divested of authority.[15]

Tod's physical constitution was not robust, and he had fallen seriously ill over the last years. His doctors had already advised him to return to England. His poor health, together with the disgrace he had fallen into, convinced him to resign his responsibilities in Rajasthan – not without great bitterness. In any case these had been much reduced. He was forty years old and had passed twenty-two years of his life in India, eighteen of them in Rajasthan. He took advantage of the return journey to Bombay to make a last exploration, which took him to Sirohi and gave him the opportunity to visit Mount Abu. On his return to England he became member and librarian of the newly-founded Royal Asiatic Society. He married and, most importantly, published an impressive historical and ethnographic account of the Rajput kingdoms, entitled *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, a book which Christopher Bayly has ironically referred to as 'an extraordinary neo-gothic monument'. We must nevertheless note that this work remained, until almost twenty years ago, the basic text and standard reference work for all historians of Rajasthan.

James Tod died in 1835 in Italy, where he had gone to try to recover his health in a milder climate. Another book, 'Travels in Western India', published posthumously, describes in detail his last journey through Rajasthan, and his visit to Sirohi.

The Rescue of the Kingdom

In the audience hall of the new palace at Sirohi, built in 1911, the walls are decorated with large portraits of the rulers of the kingdom. But among them, on an equal footing, appears James Tod. And he deserves his place there.

For the kingdom of Sirohi was able to maintain its autonomy, under British protection, only as a result of his personal intervention. It was one of his efforts of which James Tod was proudest; and perhaps it was the one which cost him most in his career, because it brought him into direct conflict with his superiors. This

[15] N.K. Sinha 1964.

small kingdom interested him particularly. First, because Mount Abu lay within its borders: in the mythology of the kingdoms of this area, which he had more or less made his own, Mount Abu embodied, as we have seen, the original home of the most ancient Rajput dynasties, 'born' from a sacrifice performed by the gods upon its summit. James Tod makes no secret of the fascination he felt for this place, or of how moved he was when he finally saw it with his own eyes:

> It was nearly noon when I cleared the pass of Seetla Mata, and as the bluff head of Mount Aboo opened upon me, my heart beat with joy as, with the sage of Syracuse, I exclaimed, Eureka.[16]

In addition, Sirohi was ruled by what was reputed to be one of the most ancient Rajput dynasties – a fact which appealed to the historian in James Tod. The Deora Chauhans traced their lineage back to Prithviraj Chauhan, King of Delhi, who had unsuccessfully opposed the invasion of the Seljuks.[17] Another reason for Tod's interest in this princely state was that he had recently been given political responsibility for Sirohi, and in a period when his authority was being increasingly contested he could not disregard such a task. When Sirohi, following the example of its neighbours, wanted to conclude a treaty of alliance with the British, the Raja of Mewar tried to prevent this, attempting to convince the British that it was one of his dependencies. Another factor was the quarrel between Tod and Ochterlony; the latter was living in Jodhpur, and tended to defend the interests of the kingdom where he was residing, if only to challenge James Tod's authority. It was at this point that Tod really intervened in the history of Sirohi. He made use of his erudition to prove that Jodhpur's claims on Sirohi were unjustified. I would like to present his own account of this intervention in full, because it clearly exemplifies the new forms of rhetoric that were to play such an important role in the colonial history of the area:

> It [Sirohi] possessed peculiar claims to my regard, its political relations having been entirely under my management since the general pacification in 1817–1818, and its Independence, both political and social, having been preserved, entirely through my exertions, from the specious

[16] J. Tod 1839:50.
[17] On the origins of the Chauhans, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya 1976.

pretensions of her powerful neighbour the raja of Marwar, who claimed her as a tributary. These claims were so well supported by argument and documentary evidence, as to obtain credit with the functionary who was then the medium of the political relations of Marwar with the British government and they nearly obtained the sanction of the General Marquess Hastings. *It was on this occasion, as on several others, that some historical knowledge of the complicated international politics of these regions enabled me to unravel the perplexities of the case*, and save the lands of the Deora from the relentless tribute-collectors of their powerful opponents.[18]

Then he gives details of the arguments used by each party:

The envoys of Jodpoor advanced their right to tribute and service from the time of Raja Abhi Singh *which claims I met with counter-proofs of their own annals*, showing that although the quotas of Sirohi had served under the Prince of Jodpoor, it was as vice-roy of the Empire not as raja of Marwar; and that in the wars of Guzzarat, where the Deora sword were second to none, it was under the imperial banner that they fought with Abhi Singh as generalissimo. *These were distinctions in political casuistry for which they were unprepared*, but as a corollary, they then adduced the services actually performed by the chieftain of Neemaj, the first of the Sarohi nobles. This argument was met by the reply that there were traitors and time servers in every State as no one better knew than the raja of Jodpoor, and that Sarohi, being too reduced in power to protect or to punish her vassalage, was no exception to the rule. Moreover, Neemaj being exposed on the borders of Marwar, was at the mercy of its enemies; but more than all, this chief being already *primus inter pares*, whom 'one step higher would make highest', looked to the aid of Jodpoor to attain this. When they found their documents would not bear out their claims for tributary services, they tried the pecuniary part, presenting a schedule of unconnected levies made by predatory incursions as time and opportunity served; but *no continuous, regular, conditional payment, no written stipulation to legalise lawless inroads*, chiefly by the provincial governors acting for themselves, appeared to substantiate the plea. . . .[19]

There follows an account of several other arguments advanced by the Jodhpur party, each time refuted by Tod.

All these arguments, though managed with great skill and subtlety, were unavailing when confronted with the truth; and I finally placed the Independence of Sirohi beyond the reach of fate, obtaining for myself in lieu

[18] J. Tod 1839:60–1 [Italics added].
[19] Ibid., pp. 61–2 [Italics added].

the hatred of the prince of Jodpoor, his varlet ministers and envoys, with the doubtful gratitude of the Deoras, whose lands were yet the scene of division and discontent.[20]

James Tod's passionate pleading on behalf of Sirohi was hardly appreciated, either by the people in Jodhpur or by his own superiors. This was one of the charges used to gradually remove Rajasthani affairs from his hands, until he felt obliged to submit his resignation. For several years, it was found expedient to simply block the file on Sirohi. By 1823, however, the situation had changed. All the other kingdoms in the area had passed under English protection – Sirohi was the only one whose situation had not been settled. In addition, Man Singh, the Raja of Jodhpur, was by now in bad odour with the British, who were no longer in any mood to humour him. So the decision to conclude a treaty with Sirohi was finally ratified, as James Tod had hoped. These circumstances, which held some bitterness for him, account for the tone of self-justification that sometimes colours his writings.

Let us first note the most significant omissions in the passage from Tod given above. We cannot overlook the fact that when he congratulates himself on having finally succeeded in placing the independence of Sirohi 'beyond the reach of fate', he means that, thanks to his efforts, the kingdom has avoided the status of a dependency of Marwar. What he does not point out is that in the process Sirohi has been 'privileged' to become a direct tributary of the British Government.

Of course it cannot be denied that English protection may have been genuinely wished for by most of the leading men in the kingdom. Nevertheless this use of the term 'independence' marks the beginning of a period in which the kingdom was to undergo much more significant external interference than it had ever experienced before in its history.

Tod's argumentation is a passionate defence of the principle of justice in history. This concept, in any case quite far removed from the real circumstances of the British presence in India, delegitimizes exactions between states that are based on force or manipulation. The only legitimate relationship would be one

[20] Ibid., p. 63 [Italics added].

corresponding to the kind of treaties which the British, following the Moguls, wanted to impose on their tributaries: that is to say, one which was the exact opposite of the relationship which had existed between Sirohi and Marwar.

But Tod's *tour de force* was to appropriate the historiography of his opponents, and turn it against them:

> the envoy of Jodpoor advanced their right to tribute and service from the time of Raja Abhi Singh, which claims I met with counter-proofs from their own annals.

The survival of Sirohi as an autonomous, if not independent, entity for more than a century, was in fact due to this first historiographical reinterpretation by Tod of local history. Through his intervention new rules were introduced, which are clearly expressed and exemplified in this text where

- although the British are presented as the real masters of the political game, their authority is not stated as such: on the contrary, thanks to them, Sirohi has regained its 'independence';
- the legitimacy of ruling dynasties is based on a redefinition of their rights, claims and privileges; and thanks to James Tod, in Rajasthan, the British convinced themselves that they were the best-informed arbiters of the real political history of the region.

The Simplification of History

The criticism most often made against Tod is that he was always comparing Rajasthani forms of sovereignty with those of medieval Europe; and that he even postulated a common origin for the Rajputs and the earliest European aristocracies. This accusation is not new, since it was made even by his contemporaries, and he defended himself against it. While admitting the conjectural and analogous nature of these comparisons, he maintained that they were of interest; he considered that other historians had erred in the opposite direction by exaggerating the uniqueness of European history, and arbitrarily denying any possibility of comparison with other civilizations. We may agree with Tod about this, at least from the methodological point of view. One has only to think of recent work on ancient Greece, or of the unending

discussions about definition of the caste-system to agree that there has never been any sure method of defining the degree of uniqueness a researcher may ascribe to the culture he is studying. Ronald Inden has shown, moreover, that Tod's hypotheses about the origins of the Rajput kingdoms were rejected on grounds that were hardly scientific.[21] They simply did not fit in with nineteenth century colonial ideology. Alfred Lyall took up the task of 'setting Tod right', by interpreting the power relations within the Rajput clans as the expression of a fundamentally 'tribal' reality, which had nothing in common with the development of feudalism in Europe.[22]

This said, it must be admitted that James Tod's historiography is indeed fundamentally biased. He has a consistent tendency to make a radical distinction between ancient institutions that he sees as characteristic of the social and political structure of the Rajput princely states of Rajasthan on one hand; and on the other the forces which led to their decline, mainly those of Islam, and following that, the exactions of the Marathas and Pindaris. This assumption reappears in the policy he advocated for the region: a deliberate attempt to restore the princely states to their earlier identity, rather than simply absorbing them into the administrative and political structures of the Empire. It is easy to see why James Tod was so highly appreciated as a historian, if not as an administrator, by the Rajput rulers; and why in his lifetime he was regarded with increasing suspicion by the British administration.

The career and writings of James Tod provide an example of the complex relationship which developed between certain forms of expertise and British policies in India. His individual enthusiasms are inextricably bound up with the usage made of them in the context of Empire-building.

His career can be divided into two periods. For the first twelve years or so Tod was the helpless witness of Maratha domination in the region, 'horrified' at the violence done to local society. As a result he developed a deep aversion to the Marathas, which

[21] R. Inden 1990:172–80.
[22] A. Lyall 1899.

later coloured all his writings. On the other hand he felt a real fascination for Rajasthani society. The investigations to which Tod ceaselessly devoted himself during these years are marked by two characteristics which are exceptional only because combined with a special intensity in him. The information he acquired was both highly personalized, and yet very indirectly gathered. From this point of view, his research was quite different from that of other orientalists of his time, who were working on more clearly defined corpuses, and maintained a critical and apparently detached view of their sources. But it is also quite different from accounts by contemporary travellers, who trusted their own intuitions more, but also restricted themselves to their personal experiences, or material which they presented as such. It is interesting, for example, to compare Tod's journeys with those of Victor Jacquemont, who covered the same ground about twenty years later.[23] Jacquemont's perception of Rajasthan – unburdened, it is true, by any direct responsibility – appears in retrospect less well-informed, but much more realistic, than Tod's.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the British still had little local knowledge, and no precise maps of Rajasthan.[24] So Tod found himself in the classic situation of the times, that of an explorer discovering a little known area. But his task was both easier and more complicated: more complicated because his job allowed him little freedom to visit the whole region in person; but also simpler, because he could summon all the informants he required. Moreover, by large-scale decipherment of manuscript sources with the help of local scholars, he had access to existing historiographical traditions. And it was essentially on the basis of these sources that Tod formed his image of Rajasthani society.

This research choice, which is truly characteristic of Tod, was to gather and synthesize for the first time, a unique historiographical tradition: that of the bards and genealogists attached to Rajput families; and to consider these accounts, which had a very specific status and function, as the fundamental text that would reveal the truth about this society. Reasserting such a tradition in a rapidly

[23] V. Jacquemont 1934.

[24] On the development of mapping in India, see S. Gole 1983.

changing contemporary context is Tod's most distinctive contribution to the history of Rajasthan.

In fact there was already a wide discrepancy between existing realities in the Rajput kingdoms in Tod's time and the image of them presented by the bards. Just as there had most certainly been an equally great discrepancy between what happened in these kingdoms in the past, and the picture given in the bards' accounts – if only because, as Tessitori has suggested, James Tod never had direct access to any really ancient chronicles of the region. In fact he based his historical reconstructions on long poems which were compilations from ancient chronicles, put together by bards at much more recent dates. But it was this already idealized, epic, and 'feudal image of Hindu society that Tod adopted, making it the constant point of reference for his assessment of local history.

What prompted this choice? It could probably be explained, at least partly, by the influence of the romantic movement upon a young man in his twenties – an influence that often emerges in his writings. There is an undeniably Byronic side to Tod, who took an active part in defending a decayed but ancient society with a glorious past against invaders who were perceived as barbarians (the Marathas, but also to an extent the British themselves).

This consistent denigration of any cultural influence which might be contributed by the Marathas is not surprising from an Englishman of the time. But when matched with an equally consistently high opinion of the Rajput monarchies, and a very lukewarm appreciation of the value of Western influence, at least from the cultural point of view, the combination gave birth to a more original approach. What emerges again and again in all Tod's writings is a repeated plea for the restoration of the Hindu kingdoms to some sort of highly idealized past state, which is expected to bring about a return to prosperity. The interesting thing is that this view did in fact determine the fortunes of the region throughout the colonial period.

For Tod's great importance lies in the fact that what might have been no more than the dated style of a work of nostalgic erudition, actually acquired an operational dimension. The relaunching of an interventionist policy for the area at the instigation of Hastings, the new Viceroy, created the opportunity for this,

which corresponds to the second period of Tod's career in Rajasthan.

We see him transformed into a master of military intelligence as long as the campaign against the Pindaris continued. But the main consequence of British intervention was to provide the Rajput kingdoms with a new status and a new legitimacy, under British protection. Then James Tod, in rivalry with David Ochterlony, obtained the long dreamed-of opportunity to give some semblance of reality to the picture of Rajasthan he had created. Everything Tod had learned about the history of these kingdoms, and even more significantly, the romantic concept he had formed for himself about their identity, was now pressed into service. It is the effects of this process that we must now examine.

From the very beginning, this new historiography defines itself by what it excludes as much as by what it includes. As James Tod's arguments in the Sirohi case show clearly, almost entirely excluded from it are all sorts of practices which underlay the history of relations between powers in the region: that is, all the means used to manipulate opponents and allies, and impose legitimacy by force or cunning. These means were not only recognized and valued, but given a theoretical framework in traditional Indian political thought, a tradition of which the *Arthashastra* is the best-known illustration. And the application of these methods constituted the raw material used by the bards in their histories of the kingdoms, from which Tod took his inspiration, while defusing their signification.

Historians today are divided about how much importance should be accorded to the concept of 'dissent' in the history of the Maratha Confederacy, and more generally, in the history of the Mogul Empire. In a recent work, André Wink, a historian of this period, has attempted to show that the rise of Maratha power cannot be understood without taking account of the constant tensions arising from the readiness of representatives of all elements of society under the Moguls to rebel against established authority. He also tries to show, from this standpoint, a continuity between the various dominant powers – whether Muslim or Hindu; because this reveals the context within which alliances were made between partners who would otherwise seem totally at odds with each other.[25]

[25] See also the excellent article by N. Ziegler 1978.

This interpretation has been disputed by Indian historians.[26] Athar Ali, for example, denies that the concept of dissent can have had the importance that Wink ascribes to it at the time of the Mogul Empire. He accuses him, along with other contemporary Western historians, of deliberately underestimating the cohesiveness of the Mogul Empire.

Without going into the details of this dispute, it seems that whether Wink's hypotheses are applicable to the Mogul Empire or not, they do have some relevance for the period immediately following the Maratha predominance in North India.[27] Wink has perhaps made the mistake of weakening his case by insisting on a continuity between Maratha history and the Hindu tradition based on very ancient texts. I shall attempt to show later in this book that in the case of Rajasthan at least, political acts based on dissent, and a more or less explicit incitement to rebellion, did indeed constitute one of the most significant factors at work amongst all the existing social and political forces. If this point has not been sufficiently acknowledged, not only as far as the Marathas and the Moguls are concerned but also with regard to civil society as a whole, this is not for lack of documentation; it is rather because almost all modern historiography of the subcontinent remained restricted for so long by an approach of which Tod may be considered one of the outstanding representatives.

One effect of this approach was to give an extremely compartmentalized view of regional history. In my view, the most serious reproach that can be made against Tod, in the context of the study of Rajasthan, is that he chalked out the lines of a historiography – and later a policy and an ideology – which for far too long disregarded the real complexity of the links between these princely states and the external powers that affected their history. This is true, whether these were Muslims, Marathas, Pindaris, or later the British themselves. Historians have only recently begun to reassess these links and to modify the often

[26] On the debate between Wink and Indian historians, see M. Athar Ali 1986–7:102–10; see also the account of I. Habib 1988, and the reply of A. Wink, together with a new comment by I. Habib 1989:363–72.

[27] For an up-to-date account on the historiography of this period, see M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, 'L'Etat moghol et sa fiscalite, XVI-XVIII siecles', *Annales E.S.C.*, January 1994:189–217.

summary judgements passed by colonial historiography upon Muslim or Maratha influence in the region.

The second effect of the historiography initiated by Tod was to reify the internal relations within these Rajput states. To summarize the way in which these states actually functioned, it would be necessary to stress – as Henri Stern and others have done[28] – the extreme fluidity of all the institutions involved in their organization. Whether we consider territorial relationships, relations between reigning dynasties and local aristocracies or the various communities within the kingdom, the way in which revenues were collected, or the rights and duties of various categories of people, we find that although more or less widely-accepted principles and traditions did exist, there was certainly no fixed framework of unquestionable rules. There is clear evidence of this, although Tod usually disregards it, in the extraordinary collection of odd facts, local traditions and conflicts of all kinds that he supplies in his books.

The facts we shall be dealing with here will make it necessary to look in two different ways at this historiography, which right up to Independence and sometimes even afterwards, remained profoundly coloured by what we might term 'the Tod effect' in homage to the work of Jean-Pierre Faye[29] on contemporary history.

On one hand we shall have to note many clues to a different historiography and ethnography of the region, in which the relationships structuring the lives of communities and kingdoms, far from being clear-cut and reducible once and for all to a few essential principles, never ceased to be the subject of debates and conflicts which moulded social life in one way or another.

But on the other, we must not forget either that the concept of Rajasthani society formed by Tod, regardless of its validity from a historiographical point of view, did in fact have a significant effect upon the reorganization of the region from the nineteenth century onwards. In fact it formed the intellectual and institutional frame of reference not only of the British themselves, but also of increasing numbers of people involved in the events which took place in the region throughout the entire colonial period.

[28] H. Stern 1991.
[29] J.P. Faye 1972.

This has the effect of confusing the picture considerably; and it becomes all the more complicated to disentangle because, as this new representation of Rajasthan spread, more and more people made use of it, either authenticating it or adjusting it according to their interests of the moment, giving ever greater consistency to this forum where 'authentic' traditions and 'invented' ones were constantly jostling each other.

Ethnography and historical scholarship did not emerge unscathed from this complicated game. For as the example of Sirohi shows, even the distinction which scholarly discourse is supposed to maintain between actual facts and circumstantial evidence was often used as just another tactic, a useful ploy, that anyone could utilize to his own advantage. So what can be observed happening in this region throughout the colonial period is the gradual establishment of a particular historiography, going hand in hand with the incursion of new methods of historical reasoning, into the arbitration of conflicts that were structuring society.

2

Noble Solutions

ROHUA, 1939

West of Mount Abu stretches a narrow band of fertile land, watered by the river Sunli and some small streams that come down from the sacred mountain. Very soon beyond, appear the outlines of the first dunes of the great Indian desert, which stretches several hundred kilometres to the banks of the Indus. Here, 10 kilometres or so from the cultivated valleys, on the border between Sirohi and the kingdom of Jodhpur, stands a small range of hills forming a perfect circle; within it, protected on all sides, lies the village of Rohua, overlooked by the fortified residence of the Thakur.[1]

Now, in January 1939, Rohua is cut off from the world. The road leading to it is blocked with a stone wall surrounded by trenches and guarded by Bhils, recruited from local tribal communities. A little further on, the narrow pass leading to the village is also barred by ditches and barriers of thorns. The only way in is through a huge wooden gate, closed every night and constantly guarded. Sentries with drums are keeping watch all around from the hills overlooking the village, and rows of trenches block all other access to the small range. Inside Rohua, fortifications have been erected all along the way to the Thakur's residence; these are manned by members of the seven junior branches of the Thakur's clan. They have been mobilized, along with their dependents, at the summons of their chief. As the Thakur himself explains, they are still in charge of feeding their own people. But as soon as hostilities begin, he will become responsible for

[1] The term 'Thakur' (lord) normally refers to Rajputs who are recognized by rulers as official holders of revenue-yielding estates *(jagir)*. The term *patvi* also sometimes occurs. The word 'Thakur' will be used in this sense here. However it is often employed more loosely, as a polite form of address for any Rajput.

supplying them with food. In addition to the people who live in the village and on his domain, the junior clan-branches, and tribals from the surrounding area that he has mobilized, the Thakur can count on support from other Rajputs of his own clan with *jagirs* in Sirohi or the neighbouring kingdom of Jodhpur – they have sent both men and equipment. He has also recruited fifty mercenaries from Sindh, on the far side of the desert, and even has a gunner from Jodhpur. Lastly, he can also count on support for his cause from powerful nobles, such as the Home Minister of Jodhpur, to whom he is related by marriage.

The Thakur of Rohua, or rather his uncle, since the Thakur himself seems prematurely worn out by alcohol and opium, was obviously very pleased with all these arrangements; he showed everything in detail to F.C. Coventry, a retired British government official, now employed by the ruler of Sirohi as Inspector General of Police for the kingdom. Another retired English civil servant, G. Laird MacGregor, held the post of Chief Minister at the time. The Thakur proudly recounted to Coventry how his forefathers had defeated an army commanded by some British officers, who had been killed in the fighting. The Thakur was exaggerating; no Britisher had been killed, but it was true that his forebears had actively participated in the 'mutiny' of 1857, unlike the Raja of Sirohi who had remained loyal to the English. A punitive expedition had been sent against Rohua. This was nothing new. The lord and his line had always distinguished themselves by regular revolts against the royal authority, and later against the British. In this way they succeeded in preserving, in this inaccessible area on the frontiers of the kingdom, a *de facto* autonomy that they were able to maintain right up to Independence.

After setting up their positions in this way, the Thakur of Rohua and his men had cordoned off the area and refused to discuss anything with representatives of the local authorities. So finally Coventry went there in person, carrying a message from the Chief Minister. As a good English civil servant, Coventry did not appear particularly impressed by all this show. Moreover he had come to Rohua accompanied by only one other person, a neighbouring noble. Like his compatriot the Chief Minister, he was rather at a loss to grasp the logic behind what he was being shown:

The position is that they are disposed to talk. But the whole affair is so disproportionate to the alleged causes of friction as far as I have been able to gather them that I am at a loss to understand their actions, which are said to have the active support in Bhils and weapons as well as advice of the bordering Marwar *jagirdars*.[2]

Obviously, all this was rather troublesome, particularly at this time, when the colonial government was trying to conciliate the Rajput nobles, as a buffer against the nationalist movement. But there was nothing exceptional about the revolt of the Rohua Thakur. Even without going any further back in time, there was practically no noble in the kingdom who had not revolted once or several times since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the British first entered the area. The Thakurs of Rohua, true to their reputation for independence, were no exception. What is more remarkable is the extremely traditional character of this rebellion, which took place only half a century ago, just a few years before Independence. The present Thakur, who experienced these events as a child, waxed no less lyrical than his forebears as he recounted this epic tale to me. In it we find exemplified all the elements that characterized noble revolts in Rajasthan, and in India as a whole.

A Tradition Analysed

Rajput Solidarity

The nobility of Rajasthan gradually crystallized over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries into about twenty major clans, whose chiefs were often rulers of princely states in the region. In Sirohi, almost all the nobility without exception belonged to the Deora Chauhan clan, whose statutory elder was the ruler.

This, however, was a relatively uncommon situation. In most kingdoms of the region, not all the Rajputs holding *jagirs* were directly related to the reigning clan. Even in Sirohi, where this was in fact the case – at least from the nineteenth century onwards and perhaps even earlier – it had not always been so, as the fragmentary information at our disposal indicates. Rajput clans that had ruled Sirohi before the Deora Chauhans seem to have

[2] C.O.L. n. 298, 1939; C.M. Sirohi to C.M. Jodhpur.

retained some land rights in the kingdom, long after they had lost political control of it. This was true, for example, of the Solanki clan in the seventeenth century.[3] Although the Deora Chauhans had displaced them from the throne several centuries earlier, an estate *(vatan)* of twenty four villages in their name is mentioned as part of the territory of the kingdom.

Jagirs might also be granted to Rajputs who took refuge in the kingdom after rebelling elsewhere. The fortified village of Pindwara (today one of the main small towns of the district) was founded by one such person, belonging to the royal clan of Marwar (a Rathor).[4] We do not know exactly when or why this person was in Udaipur, nor why he had to go into exile along with his son, but a *jagir* of several villages was granted to him by the Raja of Sirohi. However, in the nineteenth century, the successor of this Thakur was assassinated in the Raja's palace at Sirohi, and his *jagir* was subsequently included in the royal domain *(khalsa)*.

And lastly, it was also customary for *jagirs* to be granted to relations by marriage at the time of royal weddings. The domain of the Thakur of Padiv, one of the leading lords of the realm, was enlarged over the years by the progressive annexation of the *jagir* of another Thakur, belonging to the royal clan of Bikaner. This had been granted to him when his sister married the Raja of Sirohi.[5]

Thus the situation in Sirohi seems originally to have been little different from that in other Rajput states.[6] The dominant clan did not always have an exclusive hold on the domains reserved for nobles. So how should we explain the fact that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, all the *jagirdars* were in fact held by members of the ruling clan? Two observations will help us to resolve this problem. First of all, we know that throughout its history the kingdom was subject to the pressure, or more simply the attraction, of neighbouring kingdoms (Marwar and Mewar) which were both powerful and prestigious. And then we may note that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Rajputs

[3] See K.R. Qanungo 1969:88.

[4] N.A.I., R.S.A.; A.G./VII, 203/cc, Description of Pindwara as given by Garwa Kamdar.

[5] N.A.I., F.P., f.n. 1291, P, 1922–3, Note regarding the Isran-Simti Dispute.

[6] See H. Stern 1990 and N. Peabody 1991.

belonging to the reigning clan were spread over an area extending far beyond the acknowledged frontiers of Sirohi.

This may mean that the homogeneity of the kingdom's nobility was perhaps the later outcome of two complementary historical processes: on one hand, it seems that the sovereigns of Sirohi could maintain their rule only as far as they could in fact impose their authority, and not in areas where other kingdoms could rival it, allowing the nobles greater freedom of manoeuvre, whether or not they belonged to the Deora clan. Events which occurred in the early 1800s give evidence for this. But it also seems, on the other hand, that the ruler, and nobles of his own clan, exerted such pressure on the heartland of the kingdom that they gradually annexed to their own use all the territory and *jagirs* available. The outcome of these two processes was that the territory of the kingdom was gradually reduced to only the area where the reigning clan exercised exclusive rule. This is most probably the reason why in the nineteenth century the internal hierarchy of the kingdom's nobility became practically identical with that of the Deora Chauhan clan, whose structure we must now examine. I shall do this by looking at the structure of the kingdom's governing body (the *darbar*), and analysing in more detail the definition of the nobles' status.

The *Darbar*

The clans are subdivided at several levels. First of all there are the sub-clans, of greater or lesser importance, which bear the name of an eponymous ancestor, usually a younger brother of a former ruler of Sirohi. Then each noble heads a certain number of junior lineages *(chhutbhai)*, which may be subdivided in turn, down to a simple individual Rajput, holding a single small plot of land which only just allows him and his dependents to survive.

Rajputs normally intermarry among themselves, but the limits of exogamy vary from clan to clan. While some only marry outside their own clan, others may marry within it, so long as the partner belongs to a different sub-clan. This is the case, for example, among the Deora Chauhans of Sirohi. Rajput endogamy may be seen as the outcome of a long-drawn-out historical process. According to Norman P. Ziegler, one of the best historians of

Rajasthan, the formation of the Rajputs into a specific caste, more and more closed in on itself, took place much later than historians had previously supposed.[7] Up to the fifteenth century, and often later, he says, the Rajputs were characterized, on the contrary, by a high degree of hypergamy, particularly with communities which were later relegated to the status of 'tribals'. It was only from the nineteenth century onwards, as a result of colonial influence, that marriage alliances really became a decisive criterion in the definition of rank and status amongst Rajputs.

The institution that gives the clearest picture of the internal structure of the ruling clan, at least during the nineteenth century, is the *darbar*. We have some good descriptions of the one at Sirohi.[8] Strictly speaking, this term refers to the formal assembly consisting of the ruler, his chief advisers, and the principal nobles.[9] Here all decisions relating to the life of the kingdom were enacted. However the term is often used in both a looser and a more restricted sense. Loosely, it is synonymous with the administration of the kingdom. All government officials held authority as delegates of the *darbar*, and were locally considered its representatives. But on the other hand, the *darbar* was more directly identified with the ruler and his immediate entourage. So when one of the great nobles of the kingdom opposed the sovereign, he would find himself in opposition to the *darbar*, although he himself was a member of it.

Around 1920 in Sirohi there were about twelve main members of the *darbar*. The first of these was of course the ruler himself, enthroned on a raised dais *(gaddi)*. Immediately opposite him were positioned his nearest relatives. Three of these were his uncles, addressed as 'Raj Sahib'. The fourth was a cousin who bore the slightly less honorific title of 'Raj Sri Sahib'. All of these men were older than the sovereign, and he would rise both when they entered and when they left the assembly. This highly prized privilege was symbolized by golden bracelets worn on the right wrist. The nobles were divided into those who were entitled to

[7] N.P. Ziegler 1976.

[8] See Noor-Ul-Hasan Maulvi 1904; also N.A.I., F.P., f.n. 126, P, of 1923.

[9] On changes in the institution of the *darbar* in Rajput kingdoms during the British era, see E.S. Haynes 1990:459–92.

this mark of respect (*tazimi sardar*, 'single' or 'double' depending on whether the ruler would rise only at their arrival or also at their departure from the assembly) and those who were not.

To right and left of the ruler sat the four principal nobles, collectively designated by the term 'Sarayat'. These were the Thakurs of Padiv, Kalandri, Jawal and Motagaon. The Thakur of Padiv held the highest rank, and sat next to the Raja on his right. He held the hereditary title of Commander-in-Chief of the Sirohi armies. Traditionally, at the investiture of a new ruler, he would be the one to hand him a ceremonial sword, without which the enthronement would not be complete.

There was however one other noble, the Thakur of Nibaj, who was equal in rank to the Thakur of Padiv. He would occupy the latter's place if he were absent; for, also according to tradition, these two nobles would never both attend a *darbar* at the same time.

These five nobles, along with three others (Rohua, Mandwara and Bhatana), held the title of 'Thakur Raj Sri'; this distinguished them from other nobles who were only entitled to be addressed as 'thakur'. They too had the right to the double *tazim*, although two of them, the Thakurs of Rohua and Bhatana, were in a special position in this regard: they were entitled to it only when they accompanied the Thakur of Nibaj to the *darbar*. Otherwise they received only a single *tazim* like two other Thakurs, Mandwara and Dabani, with the same privilege.

What is revealed by all this complicated but highly regulated ceremonial, to which all the members of the *darbar* attached the utmost importance? To understand this, we must examine some details of the history of the clan that ruled the kingdom. From a genealogical standpoint, the ruling lineage is theoretically identical with the clan as a whole. According to the genealogists, all the other lineages are offshoots of this one. Its position as senior line gave it its authority over the clan and legitimized its hereditary right to rule. But precisely because every member of the clan could be considered a more or less distant cousin of the Raja, this relationship alone did not provide a sufficiently decisive criterion by which to assess the relative importance of the various lineages within the clan. This criterion was effective only for lines closely related to the current ruler: uncles, brothers, descendants and a few cousins with a potential claim to succeed to the throne.

Internal distinctions within the clan were based on something different. These resulted primarily from the fact that some lines had succeeded in retaining for their senior members the possession of estates *(jagir)* recognized by the ruler. This automatically entitled them to the title of 'Thakur'. On the other hand, junior members of the clan lived as dependents of their chiefs, and risked ending up as mere farmers.

The fortunes of the various lineages within the clan depended on several factors with cumulative effects. The first of these was a lineage's capacity to obtain and hold on to one or more *jagirs*, sufficiently large to enable their junior branches *(chhutbhai)* to maintain a lifestyle that, in turn, gave them a certain status. Here various means came into play: political and marriage strategies, usually both in conjunction, both within and beyond the kingdom; the wealth of the nobles, of their lineages, allies and bankers; court intrigues of all kinds; and, of course, the good or bad fortunes in war of any of those involved.

Another factor was also important: whether the descendants of the senior and junior members of a given line were able to forge a collective sense of identity strong enough to allow them, when the need arose, to act together without too much internal wrangling. Lineages which possessed this sense of common identity would assume a common name: that of the ancestor from whose time this sense of identity had been maintained, and whose name was used as a patronymic by all his descendants.

When these conditions were fulfilled, and the hazards of history proved favourable, a lineage might form a true political entity, able to acquire and maintain some sort of local rule within the kingdom, and often beyond its borders too. This process was in no way automatic. The ruler, for example, would gain nothing from the formation, within his own clan, of a sub-clan which might eventually gain an increasing degree of autonomy from his rule and turn against him or his heirs. For it is obvious that this process could lead to a split in the clan and the weakening of the ruler's authority. For this reason he would never willingly grant anyone, least of all any of his own brothers, a domain large enough to set this process in motion. But at the same time the ruler could not totally ignore the aspirations of his relatives and nobles. He needed a nobility that was ready to come to his assistance, for without them he would have no chance of withstanding the claims

of neighbouring realms. He also needed heirs to maintain his dynasty. To the extent that he could not manage without them, these were, in general, people he could not afford to ignore.

Let us now return to the Deora Chauhan clan. In this troubled context, what form had it taken over the course of time? In addition to the ruling line, two other important lineages emerged and were able to maintain their separate identities over several centuries, finally coming to include almost all of the kingdom's nobility. These were the Dungrawats and the Lakhawats. Representatives of these two lineages held no less than 130 *jagirs* out of the 165 in the kingdom in 1920. And this gave them authority over 187 villages in the kingdom, which had a total of 462 in 1911. This was a very large number, considering that the State domain itself included only 168 villages at the time.[10]

The Dungrawats were descended from Gajaji, a brother of Sobha, the ninth ruler of the kingdom and the original founder, in 1405, of a capital close to the present site of Sirohi town, which dates from the following reign. Gajaji's son, Dungarji, gave his name to the line. It seems that he played an important part in the conquest of the north-eastern part of the kingdom, where most of his descendants still have their *jagirs*.

During the reign of Akbar, a descendant of this line, Bija, who was Chief Minister ('musahib ala') of the kingdom, practically succeeded in seizing the throne by allying himself with the Raja of Bikaner. He promised, if successful, to give half the kingdom to Akbar. At this time the ruler, named Surtan, belonged to the other great Deora clan, the Lakhawats. He himself was an adopted heir. This was a particularly confused period in the kingdom's history. Several opposing claimants successively gained the upper hand, with support from the Moguls or other rulers in the region.[11] As an outcome of these conflicts, half of the kingdom was for a time annexed to the domains of the Mogul Emperor. The Thakur of Padiv, head of the Dungrawats and Commander-in-Chief of the Sirohi forces, distinguished himself serving the Moguls in their Gujarati campaigns. In 1920 the Dungrawat clan held ninety *jagirs*, which included ninety-six villages of the kingdom.

The Lakhawat clan has equally ancient origins. It is descended

[10] N.A.I., F.P., f.n. 1291, 1923.

[11] A fascinating description of alliance strategies between Rajputs and Moguls has been given by N.P. Ziegler 1978.

from one of the younger sons of Lakhaji, who reigned from 1450 onwards. During the Mogul period, a Lakhawat named Prithviraj, who had been appointed Chief Minister, quarreled with the son of Surtan, the ruler of the time. Prithviraj killed him, but had to flee the kingdom. Prithviraj's son returned to Sirohi at the head of an army in 1654 and succeeded in gaining control, from his headquarters at Nibaj, over the whole south-eastern part of the kingdom, where he levied tribute from 120 villages. In the end he made peace with the ruler, and was granted a large domain in return. In 1920 the Lakhawat clan, headed by the Thakur of Nibaj, still held forty *jagirs*, including ninety-one villages.

If we now reconsider the clan-origins of the leading nobles of the realm, we see first that all four of the Thakurs who normally sit to right and left of the ruler (Padiv, Kalandri, Jawal, Motagaon) are Dungrawats; as appropriate, the representative of their senior line, the Thakur of Padiv, holds the highest rank.

The Thakur of Nibaj, on the other hand, is a Lakhawat, while the Thakurs of Rohua and Bhatana represent two other less important clans (Sangawats and Tejawats) related to the Lakhawats. This explains why, when they attend the *darbar* in the company of the Thakur of Nibaj, they are entitled to greater consideration (the double *tazim*); for then the three of them represent the Lakhawat clan, and are honoured accordingly. The two other Thakurs who have a special place reserved for them in the *darbar* (Mandwara and Dabani) also represent junior branches of the Dungrawats and Lakhawats respectively.

One last point remains to be clarified: why do the Thakurs of Padiv and Nibaj never attend the *darbar* at the same time? This tradition dates back to the early seventeenth century, when the Dungrawat chieftain, leading the armies of the kingdom, was killed by the Thakur of Nibaj, who as usual was in revolt against the ruler. After this a member of the Dungrawat clan killed a Lakhawat rebel and received the latter's *jagir* as a reward from the sovereign. The memory of these incidents accounts for the traditional hostility between the two clans, and the closer relationship of the Dungrawats to the ruling dynasty.

So we can see that the *darbar* defines and gives form to a subtle hierarchy amongst the three main components of the kingdom's nobility: that is, the ruling dynasty, and the two leading

clans, Dungrawat and Lakhawat. The composition of the *darbar* also reflects the balance of power among these components.

Even when the kingdom was theoretically at peace, after the arrival of the British, there was not a single noble sitting in the *darbar* whose lineage had not rebelled, at one time or another, against the ruler, or to use the local terms, against the *darbar* itself. Members of the sovereign's own immediate family had tried to seize the throne, and all the nobles had threatened on one occasion or another to break their allegiance to the kingdom. This explains the ambiguousness of the institution. Officially, the *darbar* was the sole source of political authority in the kingdom, and traditionally formed a sort of synthesis of the powers of the sovereign and the nobles. But as the principle of a true sharing of power and legitimacy between king and nobles weakened, the *darbar* became more and more identified with the ruler and his personal advisers.

Nobles in Revolt

When a noble revolted, publicly assuming the status of a rebel *(bagi)*, he could count on the support of other Rajputs of his own and other clans. This support could take several different forms. The first of these would be the unconditional assistance of the junior members of his own lineage, which we saw in the example of Rohua. He could also rely on the backing of other Rajputs belonging to the same sub-clan as himself. He might ask them to plead his cause with the sovereign, shelter his wife and children, or even, if necessary, provide sanctuary for himself. But he could not be so sure of their active participation alongside him, especially if they were high-ranking nobles. These might wish to remain discreet about their support, while not necessarily refusing all forms of solidarity with him. Thus in 1939, when two junior lines of Rohua also rebelled against the sovereign, for their own reasons, they could not get the same degree of support from their chief as he had required from them.[12] Of course he would agree to protect his younger relatives and refuse to give them up to the authorities; but he would not go so far as to come out openly in their favour. The same applied to nobles connected by marriage.

[12] C.O.L., 14.7.39, Corfield to MacGregor.

These would normally decide on the basis of their own interests which side to take. When he rebelled, the Thakur of Rohua asked for the backing of the Home Minister of Jodhpur, since their wives were sisters. But the latter refused, and instead supported the Raja of Sirohi.[13] But even when they did not side with the rebel, his in-laws would not normally allow the measures taken against him to go too far.

In such circumstances, it is easy to understand why the nobles often accused each other of double-dealing. But the ambivalent role assumed by some of them also enabled them to act as intermediaries between the antagonists. All this meant that revolts by nobles took place within a complex framework which normally prevented recourse to extreme measures such as complete elimination of the rebel, and the total loss of his rights and status to himself and his family.

This distinguished these rebellions from the equally frequent quarrels or feuds that would set whole clans or lineages against each other. In such cases the protagonists could count on the unfailing loyalty of all their lineage, and the clash might lead to the total destruction of one of the parties. This was how major dynastic changes often came about, sometimes even resulting in the formation of new kingdoms. The Deora Chauhans had seized power over Sirohi in this way, by eradicating the Paramars, who themselves had wrested control of the kingdom from the Solankis.

So the participants were involved in a system of dual allegiance and multiple counterbalancing solidarities. This did not mean that the situation could not degenerate – if, for example, a sub-clan completely broke off its allegiance to the sovereign, and the ruler then succeeded in getting the clan as a whole to unite against it. This happened as late as the nineteenth century, with the Bijawats. This was one of the most powerful lineages in the Deora Chauhan clan. They too had allied themselves with the Moguls, and at that time succeeded in temporarily dethroning the sovereign, replacing him with a member of their own line. But in 1869, after a series of bloody clashes with the ruler, most of them were killed and their estates were finally confiscated and given to one of the Raja's brothers. Ironically enough, the descendants of this brother were later to become the most intransigent opponents of the last Raja of Sirohi.

[13] C.O.L., 20.1.39, C.M. Sirohi to H.H. Sirohi.

Rebel Forces

If these rebellions had been restricted to a clash between the ruler and his nobles, they would have simply represented a redistribution of power amongst Rajputs. But their real significance lies in the fact that they brought other kinds of ties into play, involving society as a whole. A noble in revolt was not counting on the support of other Rajputs alone. Let us return to the example of the Thakur of Rohua, one of the leading nobles and a member of the *darbar*.

When the Thakur stood before the fortified gateway of his domain to negotiate with Coventry, who was there as an emissary of the Raja, he was accompanied by a retinue of about a dozen people. Apart from his closest relatives (brothers, sons, uncles, and other nobles representing junior branches of his line), he was also accompanied by a Brahmin (his *purohit*) and a Jain (his *kamdar*). Both of these had crucial roles to play. The *purohit* was a Brahmin who acted as the Thakur's private chaplain; but above all he represented the moral authority and status that is the prerogative of this caste everywhere in India. In Hindu tradition, the moral, legal and religious domains are linked through the complex concept of *dharma*, which every Brahmin can claim to embody, both as an individual, and on account of his sacred knowledge and ritual function. A noble who has the support of his Brahmin will never consider himself a transgressor against the law – in the fundamental sense of this word in Hindu culture; for mythology offers him every imaginable example of virtuous heroes in situations similar to his own, starting from the heroic protagonists of the *Mahabharata*, that epic conflict between princes of the same blood.

On the other hand the *kamdar* – in Sirohi, usually a Jain – was the manager of his estates, but also as a rule his most trusted adviser on all matters of policy, finance and diplomacy. This crucial role has been consistently underestimated in studies of Hindu sovereignty, because it has no clearly defined position in either Brahmin ideology or the caste hierarchy. But in reality this triad of the authority figure, his chaplain, and the steward of his domain should, I believe, be seen as one of the most fundamental structures through which authority was exercised in the ancient political traditions of North India.

A rebel also needs an armed force, in order to resist the ruler and put pressure on him. In this case, everything depends on the extent of his own resources. If the domain he controls is large enough, he has, in addition to Rajputs of his own clan, the people living on his lands. Two sections of the population play a decisive role here: tribal communities, from whom he will recruit most of his army; and merchants, whom he needs to provide logistics. Since the power of nobles depended directly on the number of men they could mobilize at short notice, the more bellicose of them made deliberate efforts to settle tribal groups within their domains, and maintained special relations with them. The Chief Minister of Sirohi, commenting on the Thakur of Rohua's refusal to allow a survey to be carried out in and around his domains, said,

> They are also afraid of the patwari that he will write up lists of wells that the jagirdars have given in muafi to the Rajputs, Kolis and Bhils who constitute their fighting force, which they are not entitled to do.[14]

Another indication of this symbiosis between Rajput nobility and tribal communities is to be found in the latters' adoption of styles of behaviour and of patronymics for lineages which often exactly reproduce those of the Rajputs. Even today there still exists a kind of complicity between the two groups which is at odds with the difference in their respective statuses.

In addition to the men they had immediately available, noble rebels could augment their forces in two ways. If they had enough money, they could employ mercenaries, as the Thakur of Rohua did. This solution was expensive, however; and it was easier to form armed bands recruited from the tribal communities of the surrounding region. They did not need to pay these men so long as they provided enough opportunities for pillage, and assured them a degree of impunity. Up to the early nineteenth century, as Dirck Kolff has shown, a significant fringe of the population

[14] C.O.L., 29.6.39, C.M. Sirohi to the Resident for Rajputana. In another report we find the following note: 'Some of the petty chiefs, whose puttas border on Serohi, have, each, as many as from two hundred to three hundred meenas under their control. The unrestrained raids of these rude and active tribes into their neighbours lands are a source of constant alarm and distress to the quiet agriculturalists. Cattle are driven off, men are killed or wounded and, as far as I can see, no endeavour on the part of their rulers is made to check it', N.A.I., R.A.S., f.n. 39 of 1855.

was ready to take part in any armed expedition. The campaign against the Pindaris in 1817 had been a systematic attempt by the British to rid the region once and for all of the marginal population which lived more or less by pillage. But tribals, and all the small farmers who were only just surviving on poor little plots of land in thrall to powerful landlords, could still be easily recruited – especially as brigandry long continued to be a traditional fact of life for many of these people, particularly in times of famine. A noble who rebelled would usually find little difficulty in recruiting an armed band to support him.

Forms of Rebellion

The revolt of the Thakur of Rohua is an example of only one form of rebellion: that of a great lord who could afford to put his domain on a siege footing and await the turn of events. All kinds of gradations could be used to express the discreet or brutally explicit distance between nobles and rulers, and the Rajputs were certainly past masters at this game. When royal authority was weakened, as it was throughout the nineteenth century, nobles did not always need to express their rebellion overtly. They could simply appropriate rights and status-symbols that would normally be the prerogative of the ruler; and if the latter tried to reassert his control over the kingdom, they would threaten to oppose him openly. In this case, everything would depend on the existing balance of power.

Another effective way of breaking links with royal rule was to offer allegiance to other Rajas – as many nobles from the south of the kingdom did in the early nineteenth century in favour of the neighbouring state of Palampur, considerably reducing the territories controlled by the Raja of Sirohi. They threatened to do this again in 1920. Also at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Thakur of Nibaj, referred to by Tod as the chief noble of the kingdom, practically managed to secede. At the time he was allied with the Raja of Jodhpur, one of whose younger daughters he had married. It was only after a brief military campaign was mounted against him by the British that he finally agreed to accept Sirohi suzerainty, on special terms, advantageous to himself, and guaranteed by a separate treaty with the English. In earlier times too nobles had formed alliances against their

sovereign, not only with neighbouring kingdoms, but also with external powers such as the Moguls. And the Sirohi nobles never totally lost hope of getting the British to play a similar role.

By combining their efforts, the nobles could also contest the ruler's authority more radically. Conflicts regularly occurred within the reigning dynasty between the ruler, his father, uncles, brothers or sons. Starting only from the beginning of the nineteenth century, we can find examples of each of these cases in Sirohi. At the time when the British first arrived in the region, Shev Singh had usurped the throne of his elder brother, whom he imprisoned. When Umaid Singh succeeded him, two of his sons rebelled. His successor in turn clashed with his own son, in 1920. And this son was in constant conflict with one of his uncles, who intrigued incessantly to bring about his abdication. The nobles played a key role in each of these quarrels. A coalition of them had made deposition of the ruler possible in 1815; and they tried this again in 1920, refusing to recognize the new ruler. In the 1930s, they were still trying to force him to abdicate; and in 1950 they finally succeeded in ousting his adopted heir in favour of another member of the family, even after the kingdom had been absorbed into Independent India.

The balance of forces did not always favour rebelling nobles, especially when these were less powerful ones. Most of them knew, in fact, that they would not be able to hold out for very long against an expedition mounted by the State, particularly from the nineteenth century onwards when the Raja could call upon British support.

The first stage of a rebellion, as we have seen, consisted of breaking off relations with the Raja and refusing to allow his officials access to the domain. If the sovereign did not give way, he could be expected to threaten confiscation of the noble's *jagir* and to send an armed expedition against him. The noble would often prefer to take the offensive, and it was at this stage that he really made the choice to become a rebel. He would put his immediate family and his valuables in safety at the home of some relative, and then take to the hills with an armed band to harass the region. The advantage of mobility would allow a small band of determined men to disrupt the peace of whole areas of the kingdom, if only by the constant threat they represented.

It should not be forgotten here that the nobles presented

themselves as the local guardians of law and order, although they frequently abused this position. In most of the kingdom, State officials had only a minor role, and possessed little authority without the nobles' support. When the nobles revolted, they would usually challenge these officials first of all, just as they would direct their attacks primarily at villages on the State domains. As we have seen, the other Thakurs would almost never intervene against a fellow noble in revolt. If at all they did join in, on one side or the other, this would normally only add to the disorder. So a revolt of this kind could very quickly lead to the suspension of government control in part or all of the kingdom. This was in fact the Thakurs' objective: to make redressal of their own wrongs the only possible way for law and order to be restored:

> We were all very angry about this, and giving up all hope of getting a hearing, we commenced to plunder again and do all the damage in our power to the Raj. . . .[15]

They could do this with little difficulty, as this report shows:

> Deoras hang together. No Deora will help the Police against another, let alone give him up, and the cultivators are too terrified. We have had a small gang out recently, the jagirdar of Thal, his son, another Rajput and a Bhil. They have cut the ropes over 100 wells in the year that they have been operating and are still at large.[16]

In India generally, violence is viewed very differently, according on the status of the people involved. These noble rebellions show this very clearly. A Rajput is quick to regard the slightest sign of disrespect towards him as the worst kind of offense. At the same time he would more or less scrupulously respect the impunity of certain castes associated with priesthood, such as Brahmins, Bhats or Charans. When an English judge asked a Thakur why he had spared their villages, he received the answer: 'Because we are sworn to do so, and no true Rajpoot would injure these sects. They stick to us and we revere them'.[17] But the same Rajput would show little compunction in behaving with the utmost brutality towards ordinary people. Here is an example from 1939,

[15] N.A.I., F.P., Pol. A, Jan. 1872, cons. 16–38.
[16] C.O.L., 29.6.39, C.M. Sirohi to the Resident for Rajputana.
[17] N.A.I., F.P., Pol. A, Jan. 1872, cons. 16–38.

of a noble rebel who felt he had been insulted by a mere herdsman (Rabari):

> He said the Rebari had insulted him and they had to go to beat him up. They got to Nala before daybreak, found Rupa Rebari lying asleep and shot him, beat up the others, took such jewelry as they had on them, deliberately set fire to the Rebari's hut and went off in two parties over the range of hills to Rohua.[18]

For this reason, rebellions by nobles rapidly disrupted life in the area, first because of their depredations; then because the initial disorder these caused soon widened, as ordinary farmers fled and all sorts of unruly elements arrived to join the uprising; and lastly on account of subsequent reprisals, carried out indiscriminately on the population as a whole. The following example, dating from 1872, is instructive because it shows not only the kind of support that rebels might receive, but also the manner in which their suppression, even under British supervision, could make the situation even worse. An armed detachment, commanded by a British officer, halted in a village belonging to the Thakur of Rewara, who was then in revolt against the ruler. They were searching for tribals (Minas) who formed part of the rebel lord's band.

> We found the houses of the Meenas, for the most part empty except for a few women and children, and it was not till we came to the houses of the *banyas* and others that we found any Meenas; here, in almost every house men were found, some up in the rafters, others in large receptacles for grain, and many hidden in grass. . . . Having such conclusive proof of the complicity of the *banyas* and knowing that as long as men like these, receivers of stolen property, were allowed to get off scotfree, I deemed it necessary to punish in some way or other, and I gave permission to the troops to take anything they wanted from the village, preparatory to burning it. The *Maharaj Koowur's* representative pointed out that such a course would breed ill-will between the two States of Sirohi and Marwar, and suggested that instead a fine should be inflicted on the village to be rateably divided among the troops employed, and so after assembling the householders, I accepted a ransom of Rs 2250 as a warning to them and others that they cannot reside in villages like Rewarra without running such risks.[19]

[18] C.O.L., 14.7.39, Corfield to MacGregor.
[19] N.A.I., R.A.O., f.n. 298, P, 1872.

This shows that the British themselves did not hesitate to use the same methods that had such catastrophic effects upon the population in areas where rebels were active.

The Balance of Power

These rebellions took place in a paradoxical context. They brought the two principles underlying the relationship between the ruler and the nobles of his own clan to a critical point: the noble rebel challenges the principle of royal authority; and at the same time his action tests and strains the principle of solidarity which normally prevails within a Rajput clan.

Analysing the ancient writings of the Rajasthani bards, Norman Ziegler has emphasized the importance of two concepts which, he argues, constitute fundamental keys to the characteristic Rajput ethos: on one hand the obligatory loyalty which binds them to their kinsmen, and in particular the collective responsibility to avenge them, which leads to feud *(vair);* and on the other, the obligation to serve *(dhani),* to the death if need be, those acknowledged as overlords.[20] Confronted by a member of their own family in revolt against their common overlord, Rajputs found themselves forced to choose between normally complementary claims to loyalty that had become contradictory. Of course, some of them might have an interest in supporting one side or the other. But the fundamental objective of any noble revolt was a conciliation, if not a reconciliation, of all involved. This was why such revolts rarely led to the total destruction of either antagonist. When the rebellion was over, the domain would normally be returned to the Thakur from whom it had been temporarily confiscated, or at least to one of his relatives or heirs. Similarly, if the ruler were ousted, a member of his immediate family would usually accede to the throne.

So what was the real significance of these revolts, if they normally concluded in one variation or another of the *status quo?* Noble revolts were a constant testing of all the institutions characterizing the power-structure of a traditional Hindu kingdom. These structures were in fact founded on a never-fully-resolved

[20] N.P. Ziegler 1976:240.

contradiction between the principle of sovereignty – which entailed a hierarchical concept of the relationship between the prince and his nobles, based on the idea of service to the overlord – and a more egalitarian principle, based on the concept of shared kinship within the clan, and collective participation in the governing of the kingdom. The political institutions of a Rajput kingdom were built up on the basis of this contradiction.[21]

THE STATUS OF *JAGIRDAR*

Historians of Rajasthan since the beginning of the colonial era have been dogged by a dispute about the definition of the exact nature of the Rajput kingdoms, and particularly the modalities of the relationship between a ruler and his nobles. Should this be seen, as James Tod saw it, as a relation of vassalhood, which degenerated, along with the weakening of royal power, into a hereditary right advantageous to the nobles? Or should one follow Lyall in thinking that what is found here is not monarchy of the European kind, but a form of collective rule by warrior clans, that bears only a superficial resemblance to the European feudal system? Formulated in this way, the dispute was made more difficult to resolve by the fact that many different examples were in existence in India, approximating more or less closely to one or the other of these models.

But a debate of this kind does not have much significance. As I have briefly summarized, sovereignty in fact resulted from a tension between the two forces of overlordship and clan solidarity. And one of the most determinative factors in the history of Rajasthan, at least from the sixteenth century onwards, was played out within this dialectic. Colonial historiography, which claimed to know everything about the history of Rajasthan from the earliest epochs, has been replaced by a very great caution on the part of contemporary historians, who are trying to understand what the Rajputs represented before the sixteenth century, and how their power became established. We cannot base a theory on the presumption that one of these two principles is more fundamental or more ancient than the other. And there have always been not one but two ways of seeing a noble's position, depending on

[21] On the formation of these kingdoms, see N.P. Ziegler 1978.

whether we adopt his own point of view or that of his ruler. These two points of view were clearly stated in the disputes about this issue which took place at Sirohi in the early 1920s, in circumstances we shall examine later.

THE RULER'S VIEW

'Each and all the jagirdars have unquestionably emanated from the Sirohi ruling dynasty'.[22] This was how the sovereign expressed himself in 1920. The viewpoint of the State is simple: a *jagirdar* is nothing more than an individual to whom a part of the revenue that would normally accrue to the ruler from a particular domain has been temporarily conceded. So there is no question of any hereditary right which could be transmitted directly from the *jagirdar* to his heirs:

> It has been the invariable practice that whenever any succession takes place in a *jagir*, even if the successor be the son of the deceased *jagirdar*, the succession is not recognized until the State formally sanctions the succession, fixes the amount of nazrana to be paid, and issues a regular *hukamnama*. The wording of this *hukamnama* is very precise and to the effect that the village or *putta* is granted as if it were a new grant.[23]

The granting of a *jagir* is the result of a purely contractual agreement between the ruler and the *jagirdar*, which does not allow the latter any autonomous rights over the domain. There is therefore no ground for considering the portion retained for the ruler as a tribute that is paid to him:

> It is also to be noted that whenever the State has granted any *jagir*, it has invariably reserved to itself a certain share of the same and has never granted the *jagir* exclusively. It is not the case that the *jagirdars* give a share to the State but that the State grants to the *jagirdar* a certain share in the village or villages, reserving to itself the remaining share. Thus the *jagirdars* are not, as they seem to think, the granters and the State the grantee, but the reverse is the case.[24]

This is the whole question: does the ruler grant a *jagir* to his nobles, or do the nobles agree to pay tribute to the ruler?

[22] C.O.L., Keshri Singh to A.G.G., 1920.
[23] N.A.I., F.P., f.n. 1291, 1923 (18.8.1920).
[24] Ibid.

THE THAKURS' VIEW

The nobles themselves, of course, saw the problem completely differently, as they expressed in the numerous memoranda which they presented in defence of their rights throughout the whole first half of the twentieth century.[25] They argued that most of their *jagirs* had not originally been granted to them by the ruler, but were directly acquired by their ancestors during the period when the kingdom was in formation; and these original *jagirs* had been gradually redistributed amongst descendants, without any intervention from the ruler.

Nor did the Thakurs agree that they held their estates in return for services they had agreed to render to the sovereign. And indeed, unlike the case in most other Rajput kingdoms, no evidence was available that any such tradition had ever existed, or at least, been formally maintained in Sirohi, even though this had very probably been the case in earlier periods of the kingdom's history. Moreover, the Thakurs denied that they had ever shared the revenues of their estates with the ruler in any way before the arrival of the British. They simply paid a tax *(faujwal)* towards the maintenance of a regular army in the kingdom.

When trying to refer to past precedents to justify their respective positions, the representatives of both *jagirdars* and ruler faced two obstacles. First, there were no historical documents to support either point of view. Did these get destroyed at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the fire which ravaged the palace, as the ruler's supporters claimed? Or had they never existed? The documented cases were too few to be considered representative. And the situation as it was when the British arrived was also judged to be not indicative, on account of the exceptional state of disorder prevailing in the kingdom at that time.

But the main point is that both sides were searching the past for something which had certainly never existed: the statement of a general principle which would provide a single standard by which to codify the relations between ruler and nobles – as if this problem had already been settled, and the solution had only to be reasserted. The problem had indeed been in existence for a very long time; but it had never been fully resolved – otherwise,

[25] N.A.I., R.S.A., Pol., Part I, 3880, B.n. 1, 1922 (22.7.1920).

even without any documents, everyone would have known where they stood.

The intervention of colonial rule, on the other hand, had two effects. Its initial outcome was to tilt the unstable balance of power in favour of the ruler. It also led to a change in the arena in which tensions resulting from this mutual relationship could be expressed. Revolts by nobles were, as we have seen, a direct consequence of these tensions. They did not cease with the coming of the British, but they gradually lost the particular form of legitimacy they had possessed earlier. Perhaps the most crucial effect of the new colonial order was not to put a stop to these rebellions but to consistently deny them all legitimacy. The very fact that the dispute about the status of the nobles shifted partly to the juridical and historiographical arena – as is shown by the documents from the 1920s we have cited above – is the clearest evidence for this development, which we will now proceed to outline.

3

The Survey and the Mail Bags

Advantage to the Ruler

The kingdom of Sirohi comprised just under five hundred villages. This number hardly changed between the first somewhat reliable count, made in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the dissolution of the kingdom (515 villages in 1941).[1] According to contemporary reports, three hundred of these villages were paying no revenue to the ruler in 1855. As in all Rajput princely states, the land was divided into three main categories: the State domain *(khalsa)*, the nobles' estates *(jagir)*, and villages which had been gifted *(sisan* and *muafi)* to temples, to castes or communities associated with priesthood, or to groups with other special privileges (bards, tribals). In 1870, the State domains comprised only eighty-two villages, while more than twice as many (201)[2] were on Thakurs' *jagirs*. In 1938, on the other hand, these proportions had been dramatically reversed: 238 villages were on State land, whereas the number within *jagirs* had hardly changed (218). These figures more than anything else, show how the balance of force had gradually tilted in favour of the ruler, as a result of support from the colonial administration.

The British were perfectly aware that the balance of political power in Rajasthan depended on an unstable equilibrium between nobles and rulers. But they chose to stick to the course

[1] The figures given by Nainsi are difficult to use. A very approximate count made in 1856 gave 506 villages (three hundred of them inhabited). The figures become more precise only after 1866, when there were 468 villages (289 inhabited). The number of inhabited villages stabilized around the turn of the century (413 in 1908) and has fluctuated between four hundred and four hundred and fifty up to the present day. Sources: *States Reports* and *Census*.

[2] Captain C.A. Baylay, Pol. A., Sirohi Administration Report, N.A.I., R.S.A., Pol., Part 1, S., n. 92, 1869–70.

recommended by Tod, making the rulers alone their chosen partners in their policy for the region. They were fully aware of the implications of this choice. But although in general they did not have much respect for the rulers, they had even less for the nobles:

> I regret to say that the opinion I formed of them as a body was not favourable. I found them for the most part idle, totally uneducated, involved in debts and many of them given to drinking to excess. They seem to care nothing for the improvement of their estates and are opposed to all reforms. Most of them have never travelled a few miles beyond their own villages.[3]

The British administrators sent to assist local rulers always had two primary objectives: they were first required to see that law and order were maintained at the least possible cost to the colonial government; secondly, they were to gradually encourage the Rajput princes to carry out reforms that would align their administrations with that of British India. In order to achieve these two objectives, their first concern was to make sure that the local governments had sufficient revenue to enable them to establish an efficient administration. The nobles formed the major obstacle to the implementation of this policy. Their hold over more than half the kingdom seriously limited the financial resources of the State, and considerably complicated every attempt at reform. The slightest challenge to their status and privileges would lead to just the kind of civil disturbances which the colonial government wanted to avoid. By 1857 the British had become aware of the risk entailed by too much confrontation with the nobles; and later, when a nationalist movement began to emerge in India, of the support the nobility could give them. In face of these constraints, colonial administrators usually adopted a two-edged policy. They would support the ruler and his government in any conflict with the nobility, and firmly condemn any agitation on their part; but they also tried to moderate rulers when they felt that they were going too far in their attempts to reduce the nobles' power, for they were anxious to avoid any excuse for a revolt that would sooner or later force them to intervene. The awkward position of arbitrator which the British tried to maintain, accounts for the new turn which noble rebellions gradually took during the colonial period.

[3] Ibid.

Rebels Made Criminals

As we have seen, a noble rebel did not think of himself as an ordinary bandit. He saw himself as a victim of the ruler's injustice, and believed that the possibility of rebellion formed one of his most fundamental rights. By appealing to the sympathies of his kinsmen and other Rajputs, he knew that he could call on traditions that everyone recognized. As the nephew of Nathu Singh, a famous rebel of the 1870s, put it:

> I went into outlawry with my uncle Nathoo Singh, because it is the custom of the country for the whole clan to do so when there is a dispute about land. Had I kept aloof, nobody would have given me his daughter as a wife for my son, and I should have been looked down upon by every Rajpoot in the country.[4]

Of course the rebel could never be sure exactly what form of support he would actually obtain, but he felt that if his relatives let him down, they would be putting themselves in the wrong and exposing themselves to justifiable reprisals. When Nathu Singh was in rebellion, he attacked some dependents of the Thakur of Muddar, whom he accused of allying with the Raja to annex some villages which were his by right:

> Our first great exploit was the attack of the Muddar marriage party. We wanted to revenge ourselves on Muddar and had men there to keep us informed when the opportunity offered for our doing so. The party consisted of Muddar Bunneas [merchants] whom we looted near Sunwarra and carried off twelve men, six women and two children as captives to the Aboo Hills.[5]

Similarly, Nathu Singh killed the son of a Thakur because he had taken advantage of the absence of a Rajput belonging to Nathu's band to marry his betrothed:

> This was a most scandalous proceeding on his part, for he knew Nowjee was betrothed to the girl but could not marry her in consequence of his being a member of our band.[6]

Solemn traditions of safe-conduct *(bacchan)* existed for nobles in revolt, which were negotiated and guaranteed by representatives of

[4] N.A.I., F.P., Pol. A, cons. 16–38, Jan. 1872:20.
[5] Ibid., p. 16.
[6] Ibid., p. 19.

the caste of bards. When a rebel agreed to meet the ruler or one of his representatives to negotiate a compromise, it was only after making sure that he would be granted a safe-conduct for the time of the discussions. The British soon realized the impact of these traditions, and the danger they represented to local rulers:

> Many of the disputes are of long standing and there are few of the more noted boundaries that have not been annually the scene of strife. . . . On the Durbar attempting to interfere, or a *thakur* considering himself in any measure aggrieved, he would forthwith go into outlawry and endeavour to carry his point by causing destruction either to Khalsa or his enemy's land, as the nature of his case might be. Some compromise has then to be effected, and the outlaw having received *'bachan'* or a promise of safety from the hand of a Charun would be reinstated. As the outlaw in such instances is invariably sympathized with and aided by a large brotherhood, the pettiest *thakur* can make himself a source of anxiety to the State, and this fact, together with the absence of any proper force, prevents the Durbar from punishing any of its nobles.[7]

Faced with such attitudes, British officials encouraged rulers to treat nobles as ordinary criminals and to try them as such. The Thakurs must be made to understand, once and for all, that recourse to banditry, far from furthering their cause, would on the contrary, go against their interests. And they must no longer be given the benefit of the various forms of impunity traditionally allowed them. Not only must the Thakurs be held responsible for all their actions, but also, in such circumstances, face the threat of a permanent confiscation of their estates. In 1882, the British took a decisive step. The Thakur of Rewara, Sardul Singh, had been in open revolt against the sovereign for about twelve years. He had already been tried and imprisoned, and then released after a few years on the personal intervention of the Raja. At that time the main nobles of Sirohi had stood surety for him. But he rebelled again, and at last the British forces succeeded in seizing him once more. He was again tried, on 132 different charges, in more than twenty of which he was personally involved.[8] This time with the consent of the new ruler, Keshri Singh, the British decided to condemn him to death. The only consideration shown to his rank was that he was shot rather than hanged. The Sirohi nobles

[7] C.O.L., 1867; W.J. Muir to Col. W.F. Eden.
[8] I.O.L., Western States Residency Report for 1882–3.

never forgave Keshri Singh for allowing one of them to be condemned to death.

From then onwards echoes of this policy, criminalizing acts of rebellion on the part of Thakurs, are to be found in all the affairs involving them.[9] Here is another statement, dating from as late as 1934:

> Considerations of good government and of maintenance of law and order also require that exemplary punishment in the present case is a sheer necessity. He stands accused of having committed a number of offences including robbery, grievous hurt, nose-cutting, kidnapping, wrongful confinement, criminal intimidation and of having extorted a large sum of money as 'ransom' for releasing the persons kidnapped and confined. *The fact that he has committed these lawless acts during the period of his outlawry does not, as the Committee seems to have thought, help to mitigate the nature of the gravity of the offences or to render them unpunishable.* (My emphasis.)[10]

Redefining Rights

The nobility held various kinds of rights over more than half the kingdom. And almost all noble revolts originated from conflicts about these rights: exact delimitation of their *jagirs*, the share of revenue to be given to the ruler, or various factors connected with handing down *jagirs*. Once recourse to arms was considered a crime, new procedures had to be found for settling disagreements which had previously always been dealt with according to the amount of pressure – usually armed – that could be exerted by each side.

For example, there were no precise rules determining the way in which a *jagir* was granted to a Thakur, or about how he or his descendants could be dispossessed of it. This is not surprising, since as we have seen, all relations between the ruler and his nobles were essentially determined by the balance of forces at each particular moment. On the other hand, it was customary and accepted that a Thakur could not legitimately accede to possession of a *jagir* unless he presented himself in person to the *darbar*. There he must give a sum of money *(nazrana)* to the ruler, who, in exchange, would invest him with the turban *(pagri)*

[9] Several of these are summarized in V. Kumar 1985.
[10] C.O.L., Office of the C.M., n. 82, 1923.

which made him the new *jagirdar;* and he would be given a document *(hukamnama)* specifying the conditions of his accession to the title.

Conflicts often arose when a *jagirdar* died without a recognized heir. Then the question was whether the ruler would try to reappropriate the *jagir* into the State domain, grant it to someone of his choice, or agree to restore it to a relative, however distant, of the deceased Thakur. In the nineteenth century the State domain had been reduced to a small number of villages. So it is not surprising that throughout the last century, and into the first half of this one, the rulers were inclined to interpret existing traditions in the most restrictive sense. This is shown especially by a text from 1867, prepared by the Chief Minister for the information of the British Resident, in which the position of the *darbar* is redefined: 'No fixed custom exists regarding jagirdars as the power of giving and taking back a jagir rests with the Raj according to circumstances'.[11] It is however acknowledged in this text that a son or brother may legitimately claim succession to a *jagir*, on condition that he has been living with the deceased and has no separate estate of his own; and that even an adopted heir may do so, provided he has been recognized as such in advance by the Raj.

Strict application of these principles was obviously against the interests of the nobles. Their aim was to keep estates within the control of their own lineages, either by passing them on to a relative, or by sharing them between several. They always tried to follow this practice, which they felt was the only correct one. They argued that almost all the *jagirs* originated from the sub-division of domains that had been conquered by their own ancestors, and claimed that as a result they held inalienable rights over them.

But during the colonial period it was the ruler and not the nobles who had the last word in this matter, thanks to British support. In fact, when this whole issue was examined by a Commission in 1920, only fifteen cases dating earlier than 1823 were found (probably for lack of documentation) in which *jagirs* had been repossessed by the State. On the other hand sixty-nine estates had been reclaimed for the State domain since that date,

[11] Munshi Amin Mohammed, *diwan* of Sirohi, C.O.L. kaifiat n. 27, 1867.

because no heir was recognized by the *darbar*, or because they had been confiscated for one reason or another. This was quite a large number, considering that in 1920 there were only 165 *jagirs* in the whole kingdom. Another way of enlarging the State domain during this period was by claiming abandoned villages *(khera)*, said to have been illegally included in *jagir* territory. An example dating from 1910 will illustrate more clearly the way in which this kind of conflict was handled.

THE KALANDRI INCIDENT

The Thakur of Kalandri, holder of one of the largest *jagirs* in the kingdom, died without issue in 1904. It seemed as if the son of the Thakur of Motagaon, another influential noble and a close relative of the deceased, ought to succeed him, as adoptive heir. At first the ruler seemed to accept this choice. But another claimant, son of the Thakur of Barlut, intervened. He managed to get the widow of the dead Thakur to invest him with her husband's turban. This traditional gesture made him the legitimate heir to the domain. Moreover, he promised the ruler a very large sum as *nazrana* if he would ratify his succession. So the ruler agreed to reconsider the question; and, as the Thakurs bitterly remarked in a memorandum which they collectively addressed to the Viceroy a few years later:

> This naturally created a complication and the matter was referred to the Resident, with whom correspondence then went on intermittently on the subject for the next two or three years. No mention however was made in this correspondence of the *nazrana* offered, which really formed the crux of the whole matter.[12]

The Thakur of Motagaon, anxious not to lose his son's claim, began to gather an army to gain it by force if necessary. Khan Singh of Barlut of course did the same. At this time the ruler was preparing for a visit to Europe, which would take him to Marseilles, Vichy and Paris on his way to London, and he wanted the matter settled before he left. This was a matter of anxiety to his Chief Minister, who wrote to him:

> In the event of your Highness finally deciding the case before your Highness' departure to Europe, my only duty in your Highness' absence

[12] N.A.I., F.P., Pol., n. 1291, 1923.

would be to be fully prepared against any emergency in case the disappointed party has recourse to acts of violence and outlawry. Your Highness perhaps will know that the chances of any breach of peace will be considerably minimized if your Highness is pleased to sanction the adoption of one of the two parties who, by all accounts, is nearer in point of right and stronger in resources and sympathy of numbers than the other. Under these circumstances I have to draw your Highness' attention to the insufficiency of our present resources to meet any grave emergency. I must frankly confess my inability to cope with any acute and critical situation which requires military skill of a special character for suppressing acts of violence and outlawry.[13]

This letter brought the Chief Minister a sharp lesson in governmental ethics – which is quite piquant when we know that the ruler himself had not behaved altogether impartially in this affair.

I have deeply thought over and considered the views contained in your letter, regarding the Kalandri matter. You suggest that it would be in the interest of the State to support one of the two parties who, by all means, is nearer on point of right and stronger in resources. It appears that you have come to this conclusion because you anticipate some trouble which you do not consider yourself to be strong enough to curb and control. I am sorry that this does not seem to me reasonable, and I am inclined to differ from you if this be the only ground for your conclusion. Is it not the function and duty of the State to administer justice with fairness and no favour? It would be a very dangerous and weak policy to be overhauled and adopt the policy of favouring cat at the cost of mouse.[14]

In the end it was in fact Khan Singh, the second claimant, who inherited the *jagir*, as the ruler wished. But the inevitable happened. The British Resident for Rajputana received the following laconic telegram:

Motagaon Kunwar Rup Singh has besieged Kalandri with 500 men. He wants to kill me and to be the owner of Kalandri. Please, arrange.[15]

The siege was lifted. But this did not settle the matter, as we can see from a second, equally laconic telegram, sent a few months

[13] Letter from Milapchand, C.M., to Keshri Singh, C.O.L., 1909.
[14] Reply of Keshri Singh, C.O.L., 1909.
[15] Telegram from Khan Singh of Kalandri to the Resident, West Rajputana States, C.O.L., 1910.

later, also to the Resident, but this time by the Thakur of Motagaon, the first claimant:

> My claims have been disregarded. a row will commence and thousands of men will be killed, awaiting your honour's command.[16]

The Thakur of Motagaon and his son did in fact carry out raids for a time on Kalandri and its surroundings. When State forces went to arrest them in Motagaon they resisted, and fled to the neighbouring kingdom of Mewar. Then a noble related to them arranged a meeting between the fugitives and the sovereign, for which a safe-conduct was promised in the customary way. At this interview, the rebels suggested a compromise: they were ready to accept just a part of the Kalandri domain, with an amnesty for themselves and their supporters. But the ruler refused to alter his decision. He also demanded that a large surety should be paid as a guarantee for the future good behaviour of the Thakurs; and now refusing the amnesty that was traditional in this type of situation, he insisted that all of them must appear before the courts.

Seeing the ruler's attitude, the Thakur and his son broke off negotiations and fled into the night. The ruler decided that their *jagir* should be provisionally confiscated. Father and son then lived for several years as outlaws, repeatedly making raids on the frontiers of the kingdom. At last, however, a compromise was reached. Their *jagir* was returned to them, in return for a fine of Rs five thousand, and the seizure of one of their villages for the State.

But the matter did not end there; a few years later, in 1918, Khan Singh, the new Thakur of Kalandri, also died without an heir. And there was now a third claimant to the title. This man was in fact the nearest relative and legitimate heir to the estate, but since he had neither supporters nor influence, he had so far remained on the sidelines. This time he managed to get himself recognized as the heir presumptive, but could not at first obtain official recognition from the *darbar*. He succeeded in the end, but only at a cost. After being imprisoned for several months in Sirohi, he at last accepted the draconian conditions imposed by

[16] Telegram from Lachman Singh of Motagaon to the Resident, West Rajputana States, C.O.L., 1910.

the ruler: he must pay the sum initially promised by his predecessor to obtain the *jagir*, for this had not yet been paid in full. He must also pay for all the expenses caused by the revolt of the Motagaon Thakur and his son; and he had to accept annexure of another village from his *jagir* to the State domain. He also had to forego a whole set of privileges traditionally granted to the holder of this *jagir*, one of the largest in the kingdom. Two years later, all the nobles of Sirohi had a memorandum prepared on their behalf, in which they expressed their own conclusions about what had happened in Kalandri.

> Thus by an original act of injustice the *darbar* succeeded in gaining two villages besides other very large sums of money. Had any rules existed regarding adoption and succession such an incident could never have happened, and the so-called turbulent *jagirdars* of the State would have had little or no opportunity for displaying their turbulence.[17]

So from the turn of the century onwards, the traditional recourse to rebellion as a method of exerting pressure on the ruler was found increasingly unfruitful. The lack of a clear definition of the rights of each party became a disadvantage to the nobles once their acts, if they rebelled, were considered criminal. As we have seen, this did not prevent some of them from behaving as if nothing had changed. But the cleverest of them began to use subtler methods of resisting pressure from royal authority.

New Responses

As we have seen, from the time of their first intervention in the region onwards, the British consistently sided with the ruler against his nobles. On two occasions during the nineteenth century however, confronted with what they saw as irresponsibility on the part of the current ruler, they took over direct management of the kingdom, through their Resident there. After the 'mutiny' of 1857, they were even more determined to support the royal administration, since it had protected Britishers in difficulty, whereas the nobles had turned against them.

Nevertheless the nobles still had hopes of using the British to pressurize the ruler, and they continued to try to get them to promote their viewpoint. For they had always been ready to

[17] N.A.I., F., Pol., n. 1291, 1923:7.

appeal to anyone who might lend them support, whether rulers of neighbouring kingdoms or even the Moguls. In the 1870s, Nathu Singh, the Thakur of Battana and the main rebel in those years, insisted that his supporters must avoid any direct confrontation with the British, always hoping that they would agree that he was in the right in his conflict against the ruler:

> Our quarrel is with the Rao of Serohi, not with the British Government, and we have always been particular in not doing anything we could avoid to displease it. When its troops have attacked us, we have defended ourselves, and in doing so have wounded and killed perhaps some of its servants. The British Government has tried hard to kill us, but we have never touched a Sahib, though we might have killed plenty who constantly travelled between Deesa and Aboo without any escort, yet you have never heard of a Sahib being molested. We might have done what we liked with you when you encamped at Eesra some months back. . . .[18]

But the British presence had completely changed the balance of forces, as Nathu Singh's nephew acknowledged:

> But for the interference of the British Government, we would have made the Raj of Serohi give us back our ancestral land, but what can we do against the British Government?[19]

The nobles now began to apply themselves to find a way to respond to this challenge.

THE SURVEY THWARTED

They had their first success in 1908, when they prevented a land survey from being carried out and thwarted the appointment of officials *(patwaris)* supposed to collect revenue for the State on their domains. As we shall see in the next chapter, some tribal communities (Girasias and Bhils) had already managed to obstruct surveying in the north-western part of the kingdom (Bakhar area); but their action had far less effect than that of the Thakurs, who controlled more than half the area of the kingdom. The Survey was an expensive affair, for it involved engaging a British expert and dozens of employees under his orders. But it was an important

[18] N.A.I., F.P., Pol. A., cons. 16–38, Jan. 1872:18.
[19] Ibid., p. 23.

preparatory step towards a revenue reform that was much wished-for by the State government since it was expected to be very profitable.

Up to this time, in villages belonging to the State domain the ruler had retained a part of the income, varying between a sixth and a third of the harvest, depending on the status of the cultivator. People belonging to a community with a warrior tradition, (such as Rajputs and tribals) would pay less to the State; but they were subject to a series of compulsory services, and held no automatic right to occupy the lands they were cultivating. Non-warrior castes, and ones with lower status (Kalbi, Ghanchi, Lohar, Sutar, etc.) were more heavily burdened. They needed specific permits to farm irrigated land. But on the other hand, they did have a guaranteed right to occupy the land. Castes associated with priesthood (Brahmins, Bhats, Pujaris) and bards (Charans) held specific rights *(sasan, muafi)*. Their lands were normally not taxed in any way.

So far there had been two forms of taxation. The most widespread practice *(bhog batai)* consisted simply of collecting the part due to the State from the harvested produce, after the grain had been gathered in a public place. In some parts of the kingdom such as in the *parganas* of Kuni and Kharal, and in some predominantly tribal areas, the procedure used *(halbandi)* consisted of a tax in cash, based on the number of carts the farmers used. This system was less profitable for the State, which first attempted to introduce the *bhog batai* system everywhere. But now a new procedure was to be introduced. The share due to the State was no longer to be calculated according to the amount of cereal actually harvested, but instead by taking the average productivity of the cultivated area as the criterion for payment. Moreover this share was to be collected directly in cash wherever possible. The introduction of this system (known as *bighoti* or *talati*) required precise information about all the landholdings in the kingdom, and therefore demanded much more work, and more skilled personnel for collecting the taxes. So far local merchants had been deputed in turn to discharge this task, which they performed without enthusiasm.

The new system was first introduced in 1904 in the villages on the State domain. Since there was no qualified staff in the kingdom, officials had to be brought from Gujarat, most of whom

were Muslims. They moved into the villages (with the title *talati*) and began to collect information about local landholdings. Despite the resistance aroused by their presence, and the difficulties encountered in setting up the new system, it did yield unhoped-for results for the State. In the district where the experiment was first tried, revenue more than tripled within seven years.[20]

So completion of the survey, and the appointment of permanent local officials responsible for collecting taxes in all parts of the kingdom, were intended to extend this reform, which had had such positive results, to the kingdom as a whole. And in spite of all that happened subsequently this was far from being a failure. Keshri Singh, who ruled Sirohi from 1875 to 1920, prided himself on having increased the revenues of the State ninefold, largely thanks to increases in land-taxes collected.[21]

A Problem of Classification

The *jagirs* had a special status in the matter of land-taxation. The share which would otherwise go to the State was divided in half between the ruler and the *jagirdar*. Leading nobles however had hereditary right to a larger share of the revenue. The ruler's descendants were entitled to the same benefit for a time: his sons would receive three-quarters of the revenue, but their sons would get only two-thirds of the State's portion, and their grandsons would be in the same situation as any other noble.

Comparing the situation of the *jagirdars* of Sirohi in revenue matters with what was usual in British India, the English experts and administrators found that their status did not correspond to any of the classifications they were familiar with.[22] A *jagir* did not give title to an income free of dues, but neither was its holder bound to pay an annual sum, fixed in advance. In some respects a *jagirdar* seemed closest to a *zamindar* in British India, who had to pay half of his income to the State. But on one hand a *zamindar* possessed a set of additional rights which the ruler of Sirohi denied

[20] M. Keane, Notes on putwarris in Sirohi State, S.A.P., S.P., Basti 24, Makhma Khas 1914.

[21] Revenues increased from an average of Rs 80,000 up to 1904, to Rs 400,000 in 1920; see Administrative Report of the Sirohi state for the year 1905–6 and for 1920.

[22] M. Keane, ibid.

his *jagirdars*, even though they appropriated them without his consent; and on the other, also unlike the normal definition of a *zamindar*, the *jagirdars* of Sirohi were not recognized as owners of their estates, free to dispose of them as they liked. In the absence of an heir, the State would claim the right to repossess the *jagir*. Moreover the ruler claimed, even though he could not enforce it, that the State's share of revenue from *jagirs* should be collected by State officials. The British felt that it would be more consistent to enforce a *ryotwari* system for the whole kingdom, including *jagirs;* in this system there would normally be no intermediaries between ruler and farmers.

This difficulty in fitting the status of the *jagirdars* into the administrative classifications of the period had several consequences. Neither the British nor the ruler were unaware of the fact that through this issue they were challenging the balance of forces on which the political distribution of power in the kingdom had always depended. Once the survey had been made and State officials had been effectively appointed over the *jagirdar's* estates, the whole situation would be completely altered. The whole kingdom would in fact be changed over to a *ryotwari* system, in which each farmer would be directly liable to pay taxes to a State representative. This would release the farmers from their dependence on the nobles, who had so far decided at their pleasure whether they could stay on their estates or not. Then it would become clear that the *jagirdars* were a parasitic class, whose income came directly from State revenue and depended exclusively on the will of the ruler for its continuance. On the other hand, if their status were recognized as equivalent to that of *zamindars* in British India, they would be considered as hereditary owners of their domains; and as such they would be due to pay an annual sum to the ruler. Any rights and privileges they enjoyed over their *jagirs* would, in this case, be officially sanctioned.

Although around the turn of the century the ruler succeeded in enlarging the State domain, often to the disadvantage of Thakurs, he had very little success in collecting the share due to the State from their *jagirs*. The State did not claim only a share of the harvests. Sticking to the strictest interpretation of its rights, it claimed a share of everything produced on the *jagirs*, as well as part or all of the privileges, taxes or payments which the Thakurs – illegally, in its view – were enjoying. The State

considered, for example, that it, and not the Thakurs, should grant the right to cultivate new fields, dig new wells, or even to fell a tree.

In most cases however, State representatives were not even able to enter the *jagirdar's* domain; or if so, only accompanied by the noble himself or one of his retainers. So the State had no way to check what was due to it, and had to be content with the nominal sums which the *jagirdars* agreed to pay – if they paid at all. This was one reason why sovereigns were so eager to enlarge the domain under their sole jurisdiction.

Confronted with the State's inability to collect revenue on the *jagirs*, the British administrators favoured agreement on a cash settlement to be paid annually by the Thakurs. This was the policy usually followed in British India. But the ruler refused to accept this solution. Keshri Singh gave several reasons for his refusal to M. Keane, the official in charge of the Survey in 1910.[23] It was not possible, he said, to find out the Thakur's real incomes, and he had no doubt that these would be understated. It would become even more difficult to reassess these later, and the estimate accepted would inevitably become permanent. On the other hand, much land was lying fallow, although agriculture was developing rapidly in the kingdom. An estimate based on a count of land currently under cultivation would consequently lead to underassessment of taxes that would become due in the near future. His final argument was that this measure would amount to according the *jagirdars* a status which the ruler considered they had usurped, to the detriment of his own rights.

Well-Aimed Attacks

After this, at the Raja's request, Keane began surveying the *jagirdar's* domains, and appointed *patwaris* for the villages on them. But in 1913 the Thakurs blocked the surveyors' work and unceremoniously expelled the future *patwaris*. They were clever enough to frustrate the British by using force, yet with moderation.

In September 1914, a few nobles seized the mail on its way to the Agent of the Governor General, who was staying on Mount

[23] Letter from M. Keane to Sir Elliot Colvin, A.G.G., S.A.R., S.P., Basti 24, Makhma Khas 12.4.1914.

Abu. This site had first been used by the British in 1845, to build a sanatorium for their soldiers; then it had became a summer resort where Britishers and the colonial government went to escape from the heat of the plains. The noble rebels had given a warning that if their claims were not satisfied, they would commit some mischief. And when they robbed the mail, they took the trouble to tell the guards that they would not touch the contents – they were only confiscating it until their cause was heard. In fact, the mail was returned to the British shortly afterwards, in exchange for a formal assurance that the ruler would be requested to reconsider the necessity of continuing with the survey.

The nobles were not the first ones in the kingdom to have the idea of disrupting the communication lines set up by the English, in order to put pressure on the state government. The Bhils had set the precedent, in 1895, by attacking the railway which crossed the kingdom.

> The affair was clearly a demonstration by discontented subjects of Sirohi to draw attention to their grievances and not an attack on the station for the sake of plunder. But it is nonetheless a disagreeable incident and requires energetic action and severe repression. For if these men escape free, they may be emboldened to obstruct the line at night and cause a serious accident by way of further accentuating their claims for redress.[24]

But in this case the British Resident was soon able to congratulate the ruler on having followed his advice to the letter.[25] The interesting point about the episode of the mail was that it showed, on the contrary, how an action of this kind could lead to a real divergence of views between the British government and the ruler. The ruler wanted to complete the survey, and he was ready to use force against his nobles, as a conversation he had with Sir Elliot Colvin in 1914, in a railway waiting room at Abu Road, shows:

> After much conversation upon each other's health, the matter opened about the jagirdars of the State and their attitude. H.H. said their attitude was not such as could be wished, and it was only owing to the settlement

[24] Martindale to H.H., S.A.R., S.P., Basti 3, Makhma Khas, sr. 76, f. 5, 1895.
[25] 'It is very gratifying to learn from your Highness' letter dated 9.9.95 of the arrest of the notorious outlaw Bhil Manaria who subsequently died at Sirohi of the wounds he received at the time of his capture' ibid.

operations, that he was sorry he had expended a very large sum on settlement operations and that all his efforts proved useless, that it was brought about by the mail dacoity committed by the Kuni *jagirdars* and for them escaping with impunity.[26]

The ruler insisted that he would be able to overcome the Thakurs by the use of military force and show them the error of their ways. This would already have been done if he had been granted the necessary arms and munitions; these had only to be supplied, and everything would be set in order. But the British stand was dictated by other considerations. War was going on in Europe, and political terrorism was at a peak in Bengal. At a time when India was being emptied of troops, the first priority was more than ever to avoid any potential source of additional disturbances. So Colvin dissuaded the ruler from taking any new step:

The A.G.G. then said that the matter may be shelved for some time. The *darbar* is at liberty to have the *putwari* by and by in more peaceful times. . . . The A.G.G. further said that it was more advisable that at present the settlement be stopped, and it may be explained to the *jagirdars* that at present the operations are stopped and at some future time an officer will be appointed to hear the appeals.[27]

Lastly the Agent for the Governor General suggested, yet again, that it would be better to introduce a system by which the *jagirdars* would pay a fixed annual sum to the State. But the ruler expressed his total disagreement with these suggestions. M. Keane, the official in charge of the survey, was summoned by his superiors to explain the troublesome step he had taken in trying to install *patwaris* on the Thakurs' estates. He declared that he too had had reservations about this project, but also stated the ruler's reasons for insisting on it, and how he had finally come round to his opinion.

The question was left pending for several years, but two ideas continued to circulate among the British, or rather, left some trace in official reports. They realized that one day they would have to take the matter in hand themselves and start a process of negotiation on the whole question between ruler and nobles. From

[26] Note on a conversation between H.H. Sirohi and Sir Elliot Colvin, A.G.G., at Abu Road Station, S.A.R., S.P., Basti 24, Makhma Khas 11.11.1914.
[27] Ibid.

this standpoint, the solution they still found preferable, in spite of the ruler's opposition to it, was a cash settlement. On the other hand, they too felt the wish to teach the Thakurs a clear lesson. This is shown by a note prepared by Colvin in 1917 for his successor:

> Troops should be sent and when the trouble is over, a real example should be made of one or two of the leading *jagirdars* in the business. The *darbar* has never yet been strong enough to teach them a lesson and I think that Government will have to do this some day on behalf of the *darbar*. The confiscation of the *jagir* of one or two of the principal men concerned would have an excellent and much needed effect in Sirohi.[28]

Meanwhile, for the time being, the nobles had gained the upper hand: they had succeeded both in stopping the survey, and, even more, in involving the British more than these would have liked, in their quarrels with the ruler.

Hierarchy Head Over Heels

In the last years of Keshri Singh's reign (1875–1920) relations between ruler and nobles reached a new peak of discord. In the fore, following a still lively tradition, stood the two leading nobles of Sirohi, the Thakurs of Padiv and Nibaj, the chiefs of the Dungrawat and Lakhawat clans. In 1920, these two went into exile in the capital of the neighbouring kingdom of Palampur. In a telegram to the Viceroy, they explained their reasons in these terms:

> We the undersigned *jagirdars* of 23 villages humbly beg to state that the unbearable oppression and the aggressive policy of the Sirohi state have made us totally destitute and consequently, we have not been left in a position to remain under the jurisdiction of Sirohi.[29]

This showed the nobles had not lost their taste for taking the offensive. But now they had found a different field of action from their familiar forms of violence. Instead of directly confronting the ruler, they refused to discuss anything with him, and instead

[28] Note from Sir Elliot Colvin, A.G.G., C.O.L., 1917.
[29] Telegram from *jagirdars* of Sirohi to the Viceroy, dated 1920, N.A.I., R.S.A., Pol., Part 1, sr. 3880, n. 1, 1922.

began to bombard the various bodies of the colonial government with memoranda and petitions.

Relations between the British Government and the Indian princely states were conducted through a whole series of rigidly hierarchized political and administrative levels, which it was most inadvisable to attempt to cut through. An individual who was the subject of an Indian prince would normally never have any direct contact with the British Government as such – this was considered a breach of the ruler's authority.

This meant that all contact with the English administration officially had to be made through the *darbar*. Official relations between the *darbar* and the British government were no less strictly codified. At the lowest level, contact was maintained through the Political Resident in the kingdom. In Sirohi this office was performed by the Commander-in-Chief of the military forces under British command stationed at Erimpura, on the frontier with the kingdom of Jodhpur.

Above the Political Resident was the Agent for the Governor General in Rajputana. As his summer residence was in Abu, matters relating to the kingdom were often handled through him. This official received instructions from a government department (the Foreign and Political Department) headed by a Secretary who was responsible to the Viceroy and his council. The Viceroy had a dual function. As Viceroy he was responsible only to the British Crown. On the other hand, as Governor General of the Empire, he was responsible to the House of Commons and attached to the India Office in London.

By sending petitions to the Viceroy and his secretariat, the Sirohi nobles were transgressing against this hierarchic order. First, because they were calling into question the official fiction of the absolute authority of the ruler in matters of internal policy; and secondly because they were reversing the normal circulation of official information. The Viceroy's secretariat had to transmit to the Governor General's Agent, and through him to the ruler himself and his government, information about purely local affairs that ought never to have had such repercussions. This made a black mark against the reputation and careers of the officials involved locally, and to ambitious civil servants this was the most annoying aspect of the matter.

The sovereign and the Britishers frequently accused the

Thakurs not only of brutality but also of ignorance. Few of them knew how to read and write, far less express themselves in English; nor did they possess sufficient rhetorical skill to plead their case convincingly in contexts that became increasingly dominated by juridical quibbling. A few earlier quotations have given a glimpse of the way in which their petitions were couched in a style which alternated between frankly expressed feelings and phrases borrowed from legal jargon of the most convoluted kind. This was the outcome of collaboration with village scholars. The petitions sent to the Viceroy must have borne the mark of this too, for amongst the three preconditions set for any negotiation, we find this requirement from the ruler of Sirohi:

> Before His Highness can take into consideration the grievances of the memorialists, they must submit fresh petitions couched in moderate and respectful language. The present memorials are not only full of the grossest misrepresentations but are even couched in the most disrespectful and even insulting language towards His Highness.[30]

Nevertheless, we should not think that sending petitions, or appealing to ever higher echelons of the imperial government were novelties which had come into use only under British rule. These were established traditions in India, traces of which can be found as far back as the Delhi sultanate in the thirteenth century; and they had become more widespread under the Mogul Empire. These usages were essential, in fact, because they formed the only traditionally acceptable recourse of ordinary people in response to the exactions of local officials. Moreover this was one of the few means of direct communication between the men in power and their subjects. The reputation of rulers (sense of justice, care for the humble, etc.) depended to a great degree on the sort of reception they gave to the requests and petitions of their ordinary subjects. And the information they could gather from them, whether true or false, was a useful tool in their own dealings with the officials under their command. So, as J. Pouchepadass points out, the British were only perpetuating this process, while bringing it into line with their own administrative procedures.[31]

However a new element now entered the picture. At this time

[30] S.C.R. Chowdry, Sec. Sirohi State to A.G.G., N.A.I., R.S.A., Pol., Part 1, sr. 906, 1920.

[31] J. Pouchepadass 1986.

the Thakurs of Sirohi began consulting lawyers – and not just any lawyers: one of them was not only the head of the municipal council of Palampur, but, more significantly, the leader of the local branch of the 'Home Rule Party'. Even worse, in British eyes, through him the Thakurs had met Gandhi:

> The *thakurs* succeeded not long ago in obtaining an introduction . . . to Messrs Gandhi and other agitators with whom they had an interview in Ahmedabad. With such advice at their back, it is hardly to be expected that the memorialists who are now altogether in the hands of their pleaders, on which it is said they have already lavished a fortune, will adopt an attitude of reason.[32]

This is the first explicit mention of Gandhi and the nationalist movement in the affairs of the kingdom. And it is significant that it occurs in the context of the nobles' resistance to their ruler.

In 1920 there seemed no possibility of a settlement between the ruler and the nobles of Sirohi. The Thakurs refused to negotiate directly with the ruler. The ruler refused in principle any negotiation mediated by an Englishman, which the British recommended. In a bitter note to the Agent to the Governor General he explained his reasons for this refusal, which he maintained right up to his abdication:

> It appears to me than an impression derogatory to the prestige of the State and especially disparaging to my life's work in the State will be created in the minds of the jagirdars and the public generally if a British officer appointed by you for the purpose calls the jagirdars and hears their grievances.[33]

This was the situation when the aging sovereign finally abdicated, bitterly accusing the British of having forced his hand:

> I hope you have heard in newspapers that His Highness, the *maharaja* of Udaipur, is also made to resign the powers of administration, which are vested in the hands of his *maharaj kumar* [heir apparent], which virtually means: in the hands of the resident. The same procedure is adopted as was done in my case. The *jagirdars* and subjects are at first encouraged to agitate, and then the ruler is made a scapegoat. . . . I fail to understand what benefits the Government expects to gain by this policy of interfering with the internal and personal dignity of the Indian

[32] S.C.R. Chowdry, Sec. Sirohi State to A.G.G., N.A.I., R.S.A., Pol., Part 1, sr. 906, 1920.

[33] Letter from Keshri Singh to Sir Robert Holland, A.G.G., C.O.L.

rulers, who are now losing faith in the promises and goodness of the Government. The rulers are between the hammer and the anvil. On the one hand, they have their own troubles, due to the agitation of the subjects, and on the other hand they are frightened by this high-handed policy of the Government.[34]

Sarup Singh succeeded his father in 1920. For the previous nine years he had occupied the position of Chief Minister, to everyone's satisfaction, and the British were counting on him to settle the problem of the Thakurs. He was a great anglophile and friendly with a British official, Colonel A.W. Macpherson, who seemed the right man to carry out negotiations with them. But instead of improving after the enthronement of the new ruler, the situation became even worse. One of the crucial rituals in this ceremony is the moment when the future king solemnly receives a sword from the leading noble of the kingdom. It was the Thakur of Padiv's office to perform this gesture. Divergent reasons were given for the fact that it was done by another noble: a deliberate intention to slight Padiv, according to the Thakurs; or just reluctance to interrupt the ceremony when the Thakur had not appeared – although he had announced that he would come to attend it from Palampur where he was living in exile. Whatever the reason, when he arrived at the palace, the ceremony had been completed just a few minutes earlier. Immediately all the nobles present refused to offer the ruler the ceremonial tributes marking their allegiance to him. This was not just a gesture of defiance but expressed a clear intention to challenge his legitimacy in the future:

Presentation of the *nazar* and the *talwar bandi* are not mere formalities but have the signification that the ruler is acceptable to us, and if the British Government insists on the rights of the *darbar* to claim these as a right, we may, with equal justice, claim to exercise the privilege of the Sarayats [leading nobles].[35]

After the accession of Sarup Singh, contrary to the hopes of the British, the situation had become even more complicated. Now the new ruler was demanding that the nobles must offer their ritual tributes before any negotiation could begin. The nobles

[34] Letter from Keshri Singh to Sir C.E. Yate, S.A.R., S.P., Basti n. 8, Makhma Khas 21.8.1921.

[35] Document dated 22.7.1920, N.A.I., R.S.A., Pol., Part 1, sr. 3880, n. 1, 1922.

refused to do this until their rights had been acknowledged and guaranteed by the British Government. From the British point of view the only positive thing was that they had persuaded the new ruler to appoint Colonel Macpherson as a councillor, not as an official representative of the colonial government, but as a personal adviser, directly employed and remunerated by him. The Colonel's position was an awkward one: partly because he was opposed by the former ruler, who still had influence at court, and did not mince his words:

> All my hopes seem at present to have been frustrated under the guidance of Col. Macpherson and it is very natural that I should feel very keenly for the present state of affairs which is going from good to bad and from bad to worse. The impending ruin of State is crucifying my heart.[36]

In addition to the former ruler, Macpherson had to face the defiance of the Thakurs, who refused to accept him as a mediator now that he was directly employed by the *darbar*. However he was gradually able to regain their confidence, although partly at the cost of the ruler's trust. He succeeded in setting up a Commission of Enquiry in which all parties involved were represented. After many difficulties and numerous 'notes of dissent', this Commission did succeed in producing a proposal for a settlement, entitled *Rules and regulations for the jagirdars of the Sirohi State*.[37] This formulation was relatively advantageous to the *jagirdars*, in that it granted them a practically hereditary possession of their *jagirs*.

Moreover it offered them two choices of how to pay revenue to the State: either, as they had always demanded, they would in future pay an annual amount, to be reassessed every few years; or alternatively they could opt to return half of their *jagirs* to the State, the remaining half becoming their personal property, henceforth exempt from taxation.

At first, as was to be expected, this proposal was rejected by the *darbar*. But when this body had at last been persuaded to accept it, the *jagirdars* suddenly decided to refuse the new regulations. This annoyed the British officials who had the increasingly disagreeable feeling that they were being manipulated:

[36] Copies of the correspondence of Keshri Singh with Sir Robert Holland, C.O.L., s.d.
[37] N.A.I., R.S.A., Pol. Part I, sr. 3880, n. 1, 1922.

In the past, the *thakurs* have often shown a disposition to attract the help of political officers up to a certain point in order to strengthen their case against the Darbar and when that object in their opinion was secured, have tried to make separate arrangements with the Darbar, partly in the hope that by rejecting the advice of the political Authorities they will please the *Maharao* and gain better terms from him, and partly because they fear that any agreement negotiated with the help of political officers but against the wishes of the Darbar will eventually not be worth the paper it is written on.[38]

Suddenly, even in an official like Robert Holland, who was quite liberally inclined, old reflexes reappeared. After reviewing the various reasons that had impelled the Thakurs to behave as they did, he arrived at the only explanation that, he felt, really counted: 'They are a very foolish and impressionable people, easily swayed by agitators and with an ingrained love of intrigue'.[39] Quoting his predecessor, he too recommended that if they did not change their attitude they should be given a good lesson with the help of the army.

However, this was not necessary. Three years later, thanks to the joint efforts of the sovereign and the British, and on the basis of the principles set forth by Macpherson, it was possible to achieve, if not a general settlement of the problem, at least a series of agreements with almost all the Thakurs individually. Macpherson, now in London, made the following comment on this relative and very provisional success, in a tone of noble if slightly disillusioned stoicism:

I was very interested to hear the other day through a private source, and presume the information is true, that my settlement with the Sirohi *jagirdars*, the effort in achieving which almost sent me sorrowing to the grave, had at last gone through and practically as it stood. This is rather a triumph, I consider, and affords me much satisfaction as the amount of intrigue and opposition I had to contend with the State and its officials was almost beyond description. I do not suppose that Sarup Singh will ever bear me anything but the most intense hatred for all that I did for him but this is rather what one expects in a native State if one succeeds in carrying through a reform for the good of the people, so I am not the least perturbed.[40]

[38] N.A.I., F.P., n. 1291, P, 1923.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Col. A.D. Macpherson to P.S., 18.9.1923, ibid.

New Media Used to Spread Calumny

Revolts by nobles continued, as we have seen, right up to the dissolution of the kingdom. During the 1930s and 1940s, the British and the state government were constantly divided between the wish to punish the Thakurs and the fear of losing their support in the face of the rising power of the nationalist movement. The nobles knew how to play on this indecision. They never openly joined the nationalist movement, but kept enough contact with it to worry the government, which never knew exactly which side they would come down on. One of the ruler's uncles opposed him directly, and tried to establish his own right to the succession, should he ever abdicate. This kind of conflict was nothing unusual in a Rajput kingdom: it was the daily sustenance of all court intrigues. More unusual were the methods which the Thakurs now began to use to advance their cause, launching a smear-campaign against the ruler which was widely disseminated by the press and nationalist agitators throughout the 1930s. They saw this as an easy way of discrediting the ruler. I do not wish to go into this press campaign in detail here, as it will be dealt with in a later chapter. The interesting point to note here, is the way in which a paradoxical alliance was established between the nationalist movement and this Thakur, who made it abundantly clear that his only real interest was his personal ambition to accede to the throne.

The analyses above reveal one set of causes whose effects were felt right up to Independence, and even afterwards. Suzanne and Lloyd Rudolph have analysed the divisions which emerged during the decade after Independence between the former rulers of dissolved kingdoms and their leading nobles on one hand, and less privileged Rajput classes on the other.[41] There are also numerous monographs describing and confirming the significance of conflicts between rulers and nobles in the history of Rajputana, both before and during the colonial period.[42] Tensions between rulers and nobles were a long-standing historical phenomenon indissociable from the realities of Rajasthani kingdoms. The intervention of external powers did not discourage this habit. On

[41] S. and L. Rudolph 1984; see especially Chapter 2.

[42] See for example, on Marwar, G.D. Sharma 1977; and on Jaipur, R.W. Stern 1988.

the contrary, the Moguls and Marathas provided the nobles with a new range of possible alliances and combinations to play with.[43] Later they tried to make similar use of the British. The context had changed however, for unlike earlier authorities the colonial government was determined to maintain a monopoly over armed force in the Empire, and would not allow the use of arms, except under their own strict control. Their policy of criminalizing noble revolts, and the recourse to novel forms of compromise based on new definitions of nobles' rights at first proved an advantage to the rulers, who were in closer contact with the colonial government and acquired a better understanding of the new rules of the game. But as I have shown, in time the nobles too came to understand the colonial style, and gradually began to turn these new rules not only against the sovereign, but soon enough against the British themselves.

[43] See for example K.S. Gupta 1971.

4

Conflicting Truths

The Morvada Incident

No one familiar with the customs of the bards (Charans), was particularly surprised to hear about the events at Morvada in April 1921. The report of the officer in charge was confirmed a week later by the Chief Judge of the kingdom. A detachment of about fifty soldiers had been sent to this village to collect the portion of the harvest due to the State, which the inhabitants had refused to pay. When the soldiers arrived, the Charans responded in a characteristic way. They prepared a funeral pyre and forced an old woman to immolate herself upon it, forcibly preventing her from fleeing the pyre when it caught fire. What made the matter even more reprehensible in the eyes of the judge who conducted the enquiry was that her own sons had forced their old mother to sacrifice herself to the flames.

> Of the two women who died, one namely Chatra's wife was burnt alive by the Charans themselves; her own sons, Achla and Bhima and her other relatives being most forward in perpetrating this crime[1]

states the judge's report, dating from three months after the occurrence. Realizing what was afoot, the *tahsildar* in charge of the troops ordered the soldiers to move in to disperse the Charans and save the old woman. The press release sent by the Sirohi government to various national newspapers emphasized the barbarity of the Charans' behaviour:

> On learning the meaning of the smoke, the tehsildar at once gave orders to the troops to enter the village and rescue the woman. As they got within sight of the pyre, she was seen to make frantic efforts to save herself, but every time she struggled to free herself, her persecutors

[1] Chief Judge, Sirohi to A.D. Macpherson, personal adviser to A.G.G., N.A.I., F.P., sr. 32, f. 437.1, 1922–3.

threw her back into the flames. The Charans seem to have been determined that the sacrifice should be complete and armed with sticks, knives, daggers and swords, they blocked the way to the pyre and the advance of the troops.[2]

The situation intensified when some Charans began to wound themselves with their own daggers. The courage shown by the soldiers in these circumstances was all the greater since they faced not merely physical resistance but worse, the symbolic violence of having Charan blood spattered upon them, condemning them to the vengeance of the Goddess:

> We therefore increased our pace, whereupon one man and one woman stabbed themselves with knives in their stomachs and began to throw blood upon us. Still we took no notice of it, and as we attempted to pass between the Charans towards the jhammar [the pyre] in order to save the life of the woman who was being burnt, the Charans attacked us.[3]

In the mêlée which followed, the soldiers started firing. Several Charans, both men and women, were wounded or killed. In addition to these victims, there were the people who had lacerated themselves with knives, and the old woman who died of her wounds. Some merchants, leading citizens of the neighbouring town of Mandar, were taken to the spot to witness what had occurred and examine the corpses before the soldiers burned them. This version of the facts, after being confirmed by the judge in charge of the enquiries, was reported verbatim by the ruler, and by the Agent for the Governor General in Rajputana in his official report to the British Government.[4] It also appeared in both Indian and British newspapers, which received the information through Reuters Agency.[5]

[2] *Bombay Chronicle*, 3.5.21, Bombay.

[3] Statement of Subedar, app. IV, N.A.I., F.P., sr. 26, f. 437.1, 1922–3.

[4] H.H. Sirohi to Mr R.E. Holland, A.G.G., and the latter's communication to S.G.I., N.A.I., sr. 21 and 26, f. 437.1, 1922–3.

[5] 'An amazing instance of the survival of the custom of human sacrifice is revealed in an Indian Government report of the collision between officials and villagers in Sirohi State. Certain villages including Morvada are held by an ancient sect called Charans or hereditary musicians, says a Reuter message. . . . The troops were compelled to fire in self-defence, killing seven and wounding ten. They dispersed the mob, but were too late to save the woman's life'. *Daily Mirror*, 13.6.1921.

This was not an unprecedented incident. Morvada was one of eight Charan villages in the *tehsil* of Mandar, on the border with the kingdom of Jodhpur. Until shortly before, these villages, granted to this community as religious donations *(sasan)*, had been exempted from taxation. But following the survey, carried about ten years earlier, it had been decided that the Charan villages should lose this privileged status. Two reasons were given. On one hand the Charans could show no documents to prove their rights to these villages; and on the other, they were no longer performing their traditional offices, which included, for example, reciting poems in praise of the ruler on ceremonial occasions in the kingdom. Here again we find an instance of the official doctrine in these matters: all land-related privileges granted at one time or another to Rajputs or other castes would continue to be recognized only if they represented the counterpart for traditional 'services' that the holders were actually performing.[6] As this was no longer the case, the Charan's privileged status had been revoked. The Charans however accused the government of having used force and torture to get them to sign the documents detailing their new status. Only a few of them paid the new dues, under duress. As the Thakurs were doing at the same period, they too sent a collective memorandum to the Viceroy, claiming their earlier rights. And while awaiting the outcome of this plea, most of them continued to refuse to pay any taxes to the State.[7]

This was the wider context in which a widow had been burned to death in a neighbouring village (Malawa) a few years earlier, in connection with a dispute about land between Charans and the Thakur of a nearby estate. The Charans referred to this incident in their memorandum. The ruler had reacted forcefully, repeating his condemnation of such practices and threatening Charans who violated it with permanent annexure of their land to the State domain.[8]

[6] Another example of a caste of intermediaries was the Rawals, who had traditionally served the ruler as messengers, or as hostages during negotiations with *jagirdars* in revolt; these too were no longer performing their traditional functions. During the great famine of 1899–1900, they had requested a special loan. This request had been granted, in exchange for loss of their traditional exemption from taxation *(muafi)*. Cf. *State Reports of the Sirohi State for 1907–8*, p. 16.

[7] N.A.I., F.P., int. B, pros. 281, app. II, July 1921.

[8] Ibid., app. A.

It came out however that the facts of the Morvada incident were more complex than had at first appeared. The Chief Judge of Sirohi had not been the only one to visit the spot after the incident to investigate the occurrence. He had been preceded, the day after the event, by a man the ruler particularly feared. His name was Khan Bahadur Darashaw Modi; he was a Parsi lawyer from Bombay who had been appointed by the British to represent the Thakurs in the negotiations going on between them and the *darbar* at this time, organized by Macpherson. Darashaw Modi was sent to Morvada by the colonial authorities along with a doctor to attend to the wounded. But the Charans who received Modi first, showed him the body of a villager who had been shot and killed, which they had hidden in a house. As it was most unusual for a corpse not to be burnt, Modi asked why this had not been done. The Charans explained that they had kept this body and hidden some of their people who had been wounded in the shooting, in order to be able to provide evidence of what had really happened. They did not want to be thought solely responsible, or be accused of having deliberately sought suicide. Their version of the incident was very different from that given by the soldiers. They accused the troops of having killed seven villagers who were only passively opposing their entry to the village, after refusing to give them the grain they demanded. They said that the soldiers had taken away all the other bodies, as well as three prisoners, one of whom they killed on the road. They had no news of the two others and were very anxious about them. The soldiers had returned a little later with the corpses, which they burnt out of sight of the villagers. Darashaw Modi took statements from all those present.[9] These contained no mention of suicide, or of any old woman being immolated. These statements were in total contradiction with the official reports, the findings of the judicial enquiry, and with the document prepared by the *panchayat* of local merchants, who stated that they had seen the half-burnt corpse of the old woman and the bodies of two Charans with knife-wounds.

The truth finally emerged from other testimonies, including one which the British could hardly ignore, from a missionary

[9] *Report of D. Modi on the Morvada shooting affray*, N.A.I., F.P., sr. 8, f. 437.1, 1922–3.

working in the neighbouring town.[10] She confirmed that in this case the Charans had not resorted to their traditional practices. It was in fact the soldiers who had partly burned the old woman's body, some hours after the shooting; she had been killed earlier, when they were entering the village. The Hindu merchants from the neighbouring town admitted that they had been aware of this macabre pretence, but stressed that they had not in fact lied: they had confined themselves to describing the mutilated corpses they had been shown, without giving any explanation of the circumstances of their decease. Muslim merchants of the same town (Bohras) had been less hypocritical, and refused to do the same.

Assisted by Darashaw Modi, the Charans then sent their version of the facts to several newspapers and to various echelons of the British administration. The English began to feel increasingly embarrassed by the turn of events. As J.B. Wood, the highest British official in charge of this matter, stated somberly in a handwritten note affixed to the file: 'It is a bad case'.[11] The English were particularly annoyed with the Sirohi government for having sent the newspapers a false official communique which, as they should have known, would soon be publicly challenged:

> We should ask Mr Holland to point out to the darbar that the communication made by the Hazur Vakil to the Bombay Chronicle appears to have been very unadvisable and entirely untrue.[12]

They would definitely have preferred to find out the truth and punish the people responsible, especially since they feared the reactions which might be aroused by exposure of the true version of events. But now they were reluctant to repudiate the official version, for this had been confirmed by the judge, the Sirohi government, and by the ruler himself. Constrained to make some official statement about these happenings, they too chose a course that was not particularly dignified. It was decided to confirm the official version, although they knew perfectly well that it was false. But they took the precaution of making clear in their communique that this version was not their own, but

[10] Ibid., sr. 20.

[11] N.A.I., F.P., int. B. pros. 276–84, July 1921.

[12] De Montmorency, 'Routine notes', 14.5.21, ibid. The Hazur Vakil was the lawyer responsible for representing the interests of the Sirohi government before the various administrative and judicial bodies set up by the Colonial authorities.

that of the Sirohi government.[13] They also asked the Sirohi authorities to pay compensation to the victims of the incident.

VIOLENCE AGAINST THE SELF

The traditional weapon of Rajputs and tribal groups was violence against others. But in certain cases, this violence might be turned against themselves. The commonest forms of self-directed violence *(jauhar)* were voluntary self-immolation of Rajput women, and suicidal attacks of warriors who knew they were sure to be defeated. The heroic knightly traditions of medieval Rajasthan are largely based on the exaltation of such practices. There are many popular tales of how the Rajas of Mewar and their warriors defended Chittor fort, first against the troops of Alauddin in 1303, then in 1535 against Bahadur Shah, and finally against Akbar's armies in 1568.[14] They tell how hundreds of Rajput women, faced with the prospect of an imminent defeat, voluntarily went to their deaths, while the warriors, dressed in orange tunics symbolizing renunciation, made a last sortie and rushed to certain death.

But there were also whole communities whose traditional weapon was self-directed violence. For them it was not a last resort to be employed only in exceptional circumstances, but a normal threat, used to guarantee their own impunity and to exert pressure on others. This was true of Brahmins, for example. In Hindu tradition, the murder of a Brahmin had always been considered the gravest and most inexpiable of all crimes. Forcing a Brahmin to commit suicide was no less serious. So a threat to commit suicide, for which they could lay the blame on their opponent, had always been very effective. There is extremely ancient evidence for this in Hinduism, as Louis Renou has shown in a famous article on fasting by creditors.[15] If a Brahmin could not recover a debt due to him, he would sit down in front of his debtor's house and fast *(dharna)* until the debtor gave in, afraid of becoming responsible for a Brahmin's death, and found some way to repay him.

[13] Ibid., 25.5.21: 'We must get in with the communique. I think we must state the facts as ascertained by an enquiry held by the Chief Police Sirohi State under the order of H.H. the Maharao, as we are not quite prepared to accept the old woman episode as the starting point of the occurrence'.

[14] See G.N. Sharma 1970.

[15] 'Le jeune des creanciers dans l'Inde ancienne', in L. Renou 1978.

In Rajasthan in the modern period, Brahmins were not the only ones to resort to this method of exerting pressure, which was in fact more often used by other communities. The status of Brahmins was often ambiguous; for as well as high status Brahmin communities with respected positions, there were also sub-castes of Brahmin cultivators whose status was not so clear. Although their caste names might refer to the highest functions of priesthood – such as the Purohits – they performed tasks (agricultural, military) that gave their identity a certain ambivalence. And traditions of extortion by suicide seem to have been more widely used by Bhats, a caste whose traditional occupation was to draw up genealogies for other communities, and especially by Charans, the bardic caste of Rajasthan.

Bhats and Charans

A clear distinction between Bhats and Charans was not always made in ethnographic and historical studies of the colonial period.[16] According to Tessitori, one of the few scholars who worked on the bardic traditions of Rajasthan at that time, the Bhat communities had exercised their traditional roles for much longer than the Charans.[17] Their ancestors (Bhatta) were Brahmins responsible for composing Sanskrit verse panegyrics in honour of kings. They also maintained the lists of names attesting to their royal descent *(pidhiavali)*, often engraved on stone tablets in temples.

The Bhats' clientele may be scattered throughout the entire region. The genealogists of the Deora Chauhan clan of Sirohi, for example, live in Chittor. They make regular tours of the villages where their clients *(jajman)* live and stay for a few days at the villagers' expense; during this time they bring up to date the sheets *(bahi)* recording the genealogies of the families they are responsible for, noting the births, marriages and deaths that have taken place since their last visit. They keep these sheets with them, and for weddings return to provide the information required for marriage agreements, examining the degree of relationship of the young couple and the compatibility of their horoscopes.

[16] See, for example what is said about the Charans in the article entitled 'Bhat', in R.V. Russel 1969.
[17] L.P. Tessitori 1919.

Although according to Tessitori Bhats were originally from Brahmin castes, their present status is less clear. The term is often used for anyone working as a genealogist, whatever their caste-origin. So one comes across Bhats – so called because of their function – whose caste identity differs. Others consider their occupation as equivalent to a caste membership and identify closely with Brahmins, although this assimilation is not always accepted by the rest of the population. It may be noted that this kind of elasticity in caste identity occurred much more frequently than is apparent from literature on the subject.

The traditional function of the Charans was more specifically to compose poems and narratives celebrating the exploits of the warrior castes. Unlike the Bhats, whose identification with Brahmins situated them at the summit of the caste hierarchy, the Charans, according to Tessitori, originally numbered among the many communities of wandering minstrels and story-tellers of Rajasthan, and often ranked very low in the caste-hierarchy. If we follow this scholar, there may originally have been a much clearer distinction between the occupations, skills and statuses of the two communities, the Bhats using writing and Sanskrit, whereas the Charans were bearers of an oral tradition expressed in the local language.

It seems that from the fifteenth century onwards vernacular languages gradually replaced Sanskrit in some texts, and a regional epic and poetic literature developed in written form.[18] From this period date the oldest poems and epic narratives that have come down to us, mostly composed in *dimgal*, an archaic form of Marwari.[19] This development may have coincided with a change in the status of the Charans, who came to play an increasingly important role in the regional culture. As a general rule, Bhats still tend to identify with Brahmins, whereas the Charans' lifestyle and traditions remain closer to those of the Rajputs. Their status lies somewhere between the two. The Charans did not merely sing about the warrior exploits of the Rajputs; they often accompanied them to war, and occasionally even fought alongside them. But this did not necessarily differentiate them from the Bhats, because Brahmins also often accompanied warriors to battle.

[18] For a detailed analysis, see N.P. Ziegler 1976:231.
[19] On *dimgal* see J.D. Smith 1975.

So it seems that the various literary forms and styles that are characteristic of the epic tradition of Rajasthan have resulted from a confluence of the traditions of Bhats and Charans. Under the labels *khyat, vigat* or *vamsavali*, are found historical narratives, partly in prose and partly in verse, dealing with a particular lineage, clan or dynasty. These narratives contain varying proportions of genealogy, biography, accounts of historical events, and descriptive details about a particular area, the people living there and the status and rights of different communities.[20]

In this way, Bhats and Charans played a key role in creating and preserving a particularly rich epic tradition in Rajasthan. This tradition focussed on the Rajput lineages and clans; and it was largely through the mediation of Bhats and Charans that the collective identity of these clans was defined and perpetuated. The Bhats reconstituted genealogies which traced their lineages back to divine origins; and the Charans, who gradually assumed a sort of monopoly as bards to reigning dynasties, were the chroniclers of their exploits. Rajput children were largely educated by them, and through them the clan spirit was transmitted and strengthened.

As a result, all historical studies of Rajasthan during the colonial period and up to very recently were based on the genealogies and narratives created by these bards between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Tod granted little credence to their mythical narratives although he was ready to ascribe a distant Indo-Scythian origin to the great Rajput clans on the basis of hints that were no less dubious. He did however accept as historically reliable most of the genealogies supplied to him, some of which, on his own calculation, went back almost a thousand years. By doing so, he gave them a recognition and historical legitimacy which has only recently been first questioned, and then gradually reassessed in new terms by contemporary historians.[21]

The Bhats and Charans did not confine themselves to celebrating the fame of their patrons. Possessing the power to create a reputation, they could use it to either make one or break one;

[20] N.P. Ziegler 1976.
[21] Ibid. and B.D. Chattopadhyaya 1976.

and they did both. In the book he wrote about his travels through Rajasthan in 1824, Bishop Heber tells a lively anecdote about the bards' professional skills in calumny, which made them feared by all:

> A wealthy merchant in Indore, some years since, had a quarrel with one of these men, who made a clay image which he called after the merchant's name and daily, in the bazar and in different temples, addressed it with bitter and reproachful language, intermixed with the most frightful curses which an angry poet could invent. There was no redress, and the merchant, though a man of great power and influence at court, was advised to bribe him into silence; this he refused to do, and the matter went on for several months, till a number of the merchant's friends subscribed a considerable sum, which, with much submission and joined hands, they invited the Bhat to accept. 'Alas', was his answer, 'why was not this done before? Had I been conciliated in time, your friend might yet have prospered. But now, I have already said too much against him and when did the imprecations of a bard, so long persisted in, fall to the ground unaccomplished?' The merchant, as it happened, was really overtaken by some severe calamities and the popular faith in the power of the minstrel character is now more than ever confirmed.[22]

This was a very ancient tradition, as is shown by a verse-form in the bardic literature with a special style, intended to expose its subject to ridicule *(bhumd)*.[23] Bhats and Charans were all the more feared on account of their capacity to use words, because they were traditionally considered as custodians of the collective memory and possessors of the power of truth-telling. This was why Charans were used to carry messages and maintain communication in circumstances when no one else could have done so. Nobles in revolt used them to communicate with the ruler; and the ruler used them as messengers in tribal regions where no government representative would have dared to go without a large escort.[24] Charans would always carry a special dagger *(katar)* which was both the mark of their function and the instrument by which, if necessary, they would commit suicide *(traga)*.[25] An image

[22] R. Heber 1828.
[23] Ibid., p. 226.
[24] Report on Sirohi, W.J. Muir to Col. W.F. Eden, N.A.I., R.S.A., S., 22.4.1867.
[25] On the Charans' traditional practices, and British attempts to put an end to them, see the article by V.K. Vashishta 1982.

of this dagger would also accompany their signature, and it was carved on the stone markers erected when one of them sacrificed his life.

The Charans put themselves under the protection of Shiva or the Goddess (Yogamayadevi, for the Charans of Sirohi). Any injury to a Charan which led to his blood being shed was considered an injury to the Goddess and she would be sure to take her revenge, as would the bard's ghost *(bhut)*, if he died. An example given by Forbes, another British scholar from the early nineteenth century, shows how such threats might be realized:

> A Charan asserted a claim against the chief of Siela in Kathiawar, which the latter refused to liquidate. The bard thereupon, taking forty of his caste with him, went to Siela with the intention of sitting in *dharna* at the chief's door, and preventing anyone from coming out or going in until the claim should be discharged. However, as they approached the town, the chief became aware of their intention, and caused the gates to be closed. The bards remained outside and for three days abstained from food: on the fourth day they proceeded to perform *traga* as follows: some hacked their own arms; others decapitated three old women of the party and hung their heads up at the gate as a garland; certain of the women cut off their own breasts. The bards also pierced the throats of four of their old men with spikes, and they took two young girls by the heels and dashed out their brains against the town gate. The Charan to whom the money was due dressed himself in clothes wadded with cotton which he steeped in oil and then set on fire. He thus burnt himself to death. But as he died, he cried out, 'I am now dying; but I will come as a headless ghost *(kuvis)* into the palace, and will take the chief's life and cut off his posterity'.[26]

This story, presented as a true account, may be legendary. But it is of interest because it illustrates the range of methods which the bards could threaten to use. And throughout Gujarat and Rajasthan there are numerous monuments commemorating voluntary self-sacrifices by Bhats or Charans. Many such sacrifices are also recorded in the annals of kingdoms and in British archives.

In addition to their role as messengers, the Charans also fulfilled offices very similar to those of a modern notary. When a bargain or agreement was made between two individuals they would normally call in a Charan to act as a an official witness and to

[26] Quoted by R.V. Russel 1969:260.

mark any documents prepared on such occasions with his seal.[27] In these cases the Charans were more than mere witnesses; they were guaranteeing the transactions with their lives. If one of the parties defaulted, it was their responsibility to bring pressure to bear on the defaulter, threatening, like the Brahmins of ancient India, to make him responsible for their death if he did not acquit the debt.

The Charans also used their impunity in another particularly remunerative way. They used to accompany caravans on the always unsafe roads of Rajasthan, guaranteeing with their lives the travellers, animals and merchandise in the convoy. There is an interesting reference to this tradition in Thevenot's account of his journey through Gujarat:

> When my friends saw that I was determined to take this route, they advised me to take with me for my safety a Tcheron, with a woman from his caste or tribe, to accompany me to a place where there would be no more danger. . . . These Tcherons are a heathen caste much esteemed by the idolaters. They live mainly at Baroche, Cambay and Ahmedabad. When one has some of these people with one, one feels in safety, because the man makes known to any robbers encountered on the road, that the traveler is under his protection, and that if they come near he will cut his own throat, and the woman threatens that she will cut off one of her breasts with a blade which she shows them; and all the heathens in these parts believe that it is a great misfortune to cause the death of a Tcheron because afterwards the person who is to blame is the butt of the whole caste: they drive him out and reproach him his whole life long for the death of this heathen. Formerly it happened that some Tcherons, both men and women, killed themselves on such occasions; but this has not been seen for a long time. At present it is said that they settle with the robbers on a certain sum that the traveler shall give them, and that they often share this between them. The Banias make use of those people. . . .[28]

This function is also found in myths about the origin of their community. These tell that Shiva created the Bhats first, to guard his two favourite animals, a lion and a buffalo. But the Bhats proved unable to prevent the lion from attacking the buffalo, and every day Shiva had to create a new one. Tired of this, Shiva then created the Charans to do the same work as the Bhats, but

[27] *Census of India*, 1901.
[28] Thevenot 1684:38.

he gave them the courage the Bhats lacked, so that they would intercept the lion.[29]

The Charans also had total or partly free rights of passage through the toll barriers set up by rulers or nobles to tax caravans passing through their territories. And sometimes they were involved in the caravan trade, acting as agents and owners of pack animals for transporting merchandise.[30]

Simultaneously performing these various roles, the Charans enjoyed a high status in the kingdoms of Rajasthan. At functions organized to hear their stories and poems, the bowl of sweetened water mixed with opium, shared by all on such ceremonial occasions, was offered to them even before the ruler drank. They also enjoyed other privileges. At Rajput weddings, they would recite poems praising the guests present; in exchange they used to receive gifts *(tyag)* that might consist of large sums, for in theory at this time the bride's parents could refuse them nothing.[31] A privileged status was also accorded to certain bards attached to a Rajput dynasty, who bore the honorific title of *pol pat* (guardians of the door). They would receive the first gifts at weddings.[32] And rulers would grant to Charans, as to Brahmins, lands that were exempt from taxes *(sasan)*.

If their rights were challenged, the Charans would threaten suicide. Then everything would depend on the firmness of their opponents. Tod tells how eighty Bhats committed suicide before a Raja of Mewar who had confiscated a village from them and refused to revoke his decision. But he also tells how one of this Raja's successors yielded to their blackmail and finally reluctantly conceded this community the privilege of complete exemption from taxes on caravans of merchandise that they accompanied through his territory.[33]

The Charans were one of the main groups the British had in mind in the mid-nineteenth century when, under the leadership of Sir H.M. Lawrence they tried to introduce measures to reform

[29] R. Heber 1828:40–1.

[30] On the involvement of Charans in the caravan trade in the eighteenth century, see B.L. Gupta 1987:32; for the colonial period, see V.K. Vashishta 1985.

[31] N.A.I., F. pros., 1840–9, cons. 142–4 and 151–60, 1844; cons. 31, 1846; cons. 3 and 47–9, 1847.

[32] R.K. Qanungo 1957:93.

[33] J. Tod 1971, vol. 1:555.

regional customs. Charans were accused of trafficking in slaves, and of indirectly fostering infanticide of girls amongst Rajputs by the huge sums demanded at weddings. Threatening suicide was also considered an 'immoral and 'reprehensible' practice, as was *sati* (the burning of widows). The Charans were accused not only of glorifying cases of *sati* but also of practicing it. And in fact, as we have seen, when they wanted to pressurize someone, the Charans did sometimes threaten to make some of their women immolate themselves.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, at British insistence, all these practices were gradually prohibited and made crimes in the various princely states of Rajasthan. The British also tried to regulate the practice of ceremonial donations, by prescribing the sums that were to be paid to Charans and Bhats at weddings, and by forbidding those who did not live in the vicinity to attend Rajput marriages. They tried to involve the local rulers in these reforms, and encouraged them to form a body (the Walterkrit Rajputra Hitkarini Sabha) that was responsible for implementing them. Each sovereign was supposed to start a local branch in his own state. This was done in Sirohi in 1888.[34]

But these measures proved rather ineffective, as the British themselves acknowledged – mainly because, although they readily denounced the abuses of the Bhats and Charans, the Rajputs were nevertheless reluctant to act directly against their own traditions. It is also indicated by the satisfaction and insistence with which British administrators noted in their official reports every instance in which they were successful in getting Brahmins, Bhats or Charans found guilty of this kind of offense.[35]

[34] V.K. Vashishta 1982:130; V.K. Trivedi, Social policy of British Government during nineteenth century, typescript.

[35] See for example F., Pol., cons 30–5, 1834: 'The repugnance in case 6 where Charans were the prisoners, I can easily understand. And it is a strong proof of the change of feeling of the mind of the Indian community that in this sequestered part of the country the influence of enlightened British policy operating at a distance has eradicated or much weakened prejudice that twenty years ago, could hardly have been conquered. I recollect in 1815, being the first judge who ever condemned to death Charans. They were executed at Goga where they had committed a foul but atrocious murder. The crime however appeared at the time not to warrant the deprivation of life of a Charan. . . . Since then every year has tended to divest their person as well as Bhats of their sacred character and to class them within proper places in society as ordinary men'.

The impact of colonization upon the life and traditions of these communities made itself felt indirectly more than through direct repressive measures. It was linked with a gradual loss of the patronage they had so long received from the Rajputs. This was an irony of history, for we have seen how James Tod based the essence of his historiography on their writings. But his works, like those of other colonial officials such as Erskine, or Forbes in Gujarat, enjoyed the respect accorded to studies which observed the norms of Western scholarship. The works of British writers became the standard reference tools of all historical discussion about the region, to the detriment of the Charans, whose traditional expertise was relegated to the domain of epic and poetic literature and became a curiosity for orientalists and students of folklore, but lost all political influence.

Some Charans, understanding the situation, abandoned their traditional style and began in turn to compile 'histories' of the regional princely states, borrowing more or less skilfully the lines of Western scholarship. A first Western-style history of the kingdom of Mewar, *(Vir Vinod)* was prepared by a Charan attached to the ruler, Kaviraj Shyamaldas, in 1884.[36] This tendency spread, especially in the first half of this century. In Sirohi, for example, Keshri Singh employed the services of one of the best local historians, Pandit Gauri Shankar Ojha, a Brahmin from Sirohi, to prepare a history of the kingdom. This was published first in Hindi, at the request of the historian, and then translated into English.[37] To this day, it remains the only attempt at a complete history of the kingdom. Similarly, in 1914 in Jodhpur, while he was pursuing his own studies, Tessitori severely criticized the work being done on a history of the kingdom by some Indian historians under the patronage of the ruler; he saw it as a dubious synthesis of Western historiographical pretensions with local traditions:

> It is a matter of much regret that with only one or two exceptions, the Princes of Rajputana have not yet fully realized the fact that History is a scientific discipline, not an exercise of rhetoric and imagination.[38]

The development of this new historiography had consequences that were not purely academic. A first effect was to discredit the

[36] See R.K. Qanungo 1957:93.
[37] On G.S. Ojha, see S.L. Patni 1988.
[38] L.P. Tessitori 1919:29.

bardic traditions, though still making use of them. For although the bards' material was recycled by historians, it lost most of its immediate relevance. And at the same time the bards lost their patronage and prestige at royal courts.

Soon all the functions performed by the Charans were challenged in one way or another. The huge sums *(tyag)* they used to receive at weddings had already been denounced. Their income as traders and protectors of caravans diminished, quite independently from any cultural challenge: first, because roads became safer, due to the British presence; and most decisively, because of the railway, introduced to the region around 1870. The gradual development of a system of civil law on British lines also began to make their role as guarantors to commercial and financial transactions obsolete.

As a result, most Charans gradually gave up their traditional occupations, and fell back on the only activity of theirs that had not been challenged: cultivation of the lands granted to them at various times by rulers, exempt from all dues to the State.

All this explains why in Sirohi the Charans and Bhats, who no longer had any influence with the ruler, were also targets of the same reforms which provoked the nobles to revolt. The State government decided to withdraw the privileges their communities enjoyed. The official justification was that as they were no longer performing their traditional function, there was no reason why they should continue to enjoy any special privileges. And this is why, in the early 1920s, the Charans, like the nobles, rebelled against the administration, which led to incidents like that at Morvada.

THE BARDS' TRUTH

In a fascinating book, Marcel Detienne has analysed the various different registers in which the concept of 'truth' was expressed in the traditions of ancient Greece; he attempts to discern the processes which led to the emergence of new modes of rational thinking, on which Western culture has based itself.[39] Pascal Boyer too, in a recent study, has pointed to differences in the ways 'truth' is perceived in different societies.[40] He argues that in

[39] M. Detienne 1967.
[40] P. Boyer 1990.

'traditional' societies truth is something rare. Far from being equivalent to an unvarnished reporting of facts, more or less within reach of any bona fide witness, the utterance of truth, to be acknowledged as such, requires very special preconditions, one of which is the competence of the speaker to express himself in the grip of situations which determine his words while marking their validity: something much more than the simple fact of bearing witness.

This is relevant here. Of course, the concept of truth, in the sense that we normally use it to describe any statement worthy of respect, is constantly used in Indian society too. But this mode of expressing the truth is applicable only to phenomenal appearances, whose misleading and illusory character is frequently emphasized in India. Moreover, limitations in the validity of testimonies are acknowledged here, as everywhere, when statements conflict and the people called on as witnesses have an interest in a particular version of the facts.

So there are more fundamental forms of truth than those based only on testimony and the expression of individual points of view. And there are traditions which give access to this more fundamental order of truth. The sacred texts of Hinduism, for example, constitute a highly respected repository of knowledge, transmitted to men by sages *(rishis)* who had access to it through direct 'vision'. The responsibility of preserving and handing down these truths intact constitutes the most sacred duty of Brahmins, and distinguishes them from other castes. Similarly, enlightenment achieved through asceticism is believed to enable individuals to contact the ultimate truths of the universe. On another register, there are various processes which allow individuals to become direct mouthpieces for the gods, by possession. Although this is a complicated matter, since the gods themselves are not always considered to be in possession of ultimate truth, nevertheless their truth is valued much more than that of mere men. And there are other processes – divination or ordeals, for example – which give access to a truth that is also more reliable than ordinary human testimony.

Without going into all the complicated details of these processes and the multiple interwoven relationships between these various forms of access to truth, it is possible to isolate one or two points that may help us here. First of all it is worth noting that there

often seems to be a link between the capacity to express truth, and an absence of fear in the face of death or suffering. This applies to ordeals, where almost all the diverse processes used take it as an indication of truth and the innocence of those presumed guilty, if they are able survive physical ordeals that no one could normally endure.[41] We may also note the importance of procedures indicating indifference to pain in possession rituals and many ascetic practices.

On the other hand it is clear that truths expressed under such circumstances do not conform to the usual criteria for distinguishing between the truth and falsehood in conflicting testimonies; for one of their essential functions is precisely to compensate for the absence or contradiction of trustworthy evidence. The guarantee of their truthfulness lies in the circumstances of their utterance, which gives them a quality transcending any purely human or individual testimony. Pascal Boyer has shown that some of the characteristics common to many traditional cultures (care in preserving the accuracy of formulations, elaborate procedures for verifying the specific competence of 'masters of truth', etc.) correspond to a seeking for such guarantees.

From such a background, rather than on the basis of textual analysis alone as has often been done, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the traditions characterizing the bards of Rajasthan, and the way in which these traditions were confronted with changes introduced during the colonial period. The bards' traditional status was in fact based on their acknowledged competence to express truth. The indications by which this competence was assessed depended not so much on the supposed equivalence of their narratives to actual facts, as on the sacred nature of their inspiration.

One indication of this sacredness lies in the definition of their identity, which testifies to their closeness to the divine. As we have seen, the origin-myths of their communities emphasize their divine origin, for they were supposed to have been created by Shiva. But unlike other castes who also claimed a similar origin, this identity was additionally endorsed by the way they were habitually treated. As for *sadhus*, deference in this case was an acknowledgement, not of high social status, but of a specific vocation.

[41] See for example M. Carstairs 1983.

Their creativity, their skill in memorizing and reciting poems and in making up new ones on the spot, was evidence of their connection with the sacred. Poetic skill was not perceived as an individual gift, or a form of expertise handed down within their community; it testified to direct inspiration from the gods, which was then endorsed by the status accorded to their words and writings.

So the truth-function of the bards cannot be directly defined in terms of values which simply contrast truth with fiction and celebrate the power of the true over the false. The full value of a bard's word was acknowledged, not so much because it enabled truth to overcome falsehood, as because it embodied the much more awe-inspiring capacity to make either 'truth' or 'falsehood' prevail, by lending them the power of ritual inspiration. This applied especially to praise and blame, the glorification or invective that were their real weapons. At the beginning of this chapter we saw that Bhats and Charans, whose traditional function was to praise their clients, might also be experts in the art of calumny and insult. Their words were all the more effective in such cases because, like rumour or ballads, they quickly lost the status of texts by particular authors and acquired a life of their own. It was this that gave their words power.

This brings us to the bards most typical weapon: the threat to shed their own blood if anyone tried to harm them, or simply refused their demands. Then the Charans explicitly threatened to give maximum effectivity to their imprecations, which would be carried out by their ghosts *(bhut)*. A suicide could not be given the normal funerary rites which, after a brief laminal period, would assure transition from the state of 'wandering dead', particularly dangerous to those close to him, to that of protective ancestor. The bards made maximum play on this tradition, which is strong in the Hindu cultural universe, as in many others. To have no fear of suffering or death is in itself a feature that gives a person's behaviour and actions a status distinct from his individual identity. This applies to the ascetic, and to the warrior, who has much in common with him. But the bard goes further, by accepting a greater risk than that of sacrifice, which is the warrior's destiny. He takes the risk of suicide, whose status in Hinduism is more ambiguous, and which cannot be avenged by his family, as the warrior's death can, but only by his own ghost, or by his protective

deities. This risk reinforces his status and gives him more power. Since it was not possible to pressurize bards by threats or violence, their favours had to be solicited by other means. And the best way was to buy their favour by treating them with the greatest possible generosity.

This ambiguity was not restricted to the bards; it is also found in the ancient Indian institution of *dakshina*, gifts given to Brahmins to conclude a sacrifice. No doubt these gifts acquired a complex cultural and ceremonial significance.[42] But generosity towards Brahmins was also more simply considered as public evidence of true piety.

The 'glory' of a Rajput, like that of the warriors of ancient Greece, depended largely on the talent of the bards responsible for commemorating it. And to be sure of their praises, it was advisable to show great generosity to them. The word *khyat*, used for royal chronicles in Rajasthan, probably derives from a family of Sanskrit terms where the concepts of 'glory', 'fame' and 'narration' *(khyati–akhyati)* are closely related.[43] We come full circle when we notice that generosity to bards was presented by the latter not as a cause, but as an indication of the fame a prince could boast of – although it is not surprising that their prose was full of this idea.[44] In the seventeenth century, we find numerous accounts of rulers who went along with this notion and spent very large sums on their bards.[45] But there were others who refused this kind of extortion, risking the bards' vengeance through suicide; and this is a sign of the ambivalence that must often have been felt about them, particularly by Rajputs, an ambivalence we find frequent indications of in the nineteenth century and up to the present day.

In Rajasthan, then, the bards enjoyed an influence and social status that was unparalleled elsewhere in India, largely due to their special connections with Rajput dynasties. Even in 1914 Charan communities in Marwar held 350 villages that were totally exempt from all dues to the State *(sasan)*. Similarly, one of the

[42] On the concept of *dakshina* in ancient Brahminism, see C. Malamoud 1976.
[43] L.P. Tessitori 1919.
[44] On the general importance of gift-giving among royalty in India, see N. Dirks 1987.
[45] See K.S. Ujwal 1991.

main tutelary goddesses of the rulers of Bikaner was a divinized form of a woman from this community (Karaniji).[46] But it also seems that that the tradition of which they were the outstanding representatives was also influential in the rest of the subcontinent. This is argued, for example, by Fuhrer-Haimendorf, who stresses that similar traditions were maintained by other communities who also had bards. He gives the example of Gond, and regrets the absence of sufficient studies of south India where very similar traditions seem to have existed.[47]

Ethnographic information from Rajasthan and some Himalayan areas supports Fuhrer-Haimendorf's statement. In the Himalayas traditions can still be found which throw light on practices whose significance may be less obvious in the India of the plains. Communities of rather low status used to compose commemorative songs describing the numerous feuds between the great warrior clans that ruled these valleys. These clans were more or less assimilated to Rajputs, although this status was never acknowledged by the nobility of the small Himalayan princely states. Here the sacred character of the songs is particularly marked, because they are composed in temples dedicated to Shiva (Bijat), on mountain-tops. And here too we find a concept of the objectivity characteristic of epic poetry. These songs are composed at the end of the feud, when the parties involved have reached an accord; they seal the reconciliation between the warring clans, and are carefully composed so that there is a balance in the heroic episodes featuring each of the clans, and the praises celebrating their courage. This ensures that the songs will become part of the shared heritage of all the clans in the region. And the version of the facts given in them will become the 'true' version of events for everyone.[48] In the truth of these songs, a concern for balance in praise and blame, as well as the sacred nature of their inspiration, compete with the concern for unvarnished fact, partly because the bards never directly witnessed the events they describe. But this does not mean either that they are completely devoid of factual truth. To return to Rajasthan, this is nicely expressed in this Charan verse, reported by Forbes:

[46] See L.P. Tessitori 1917:292.

[47] C. Fuhrer-Haimendorf, 'The Historical value of Indian bardic literature', in C.H. Philips (ed.), 1961.

[48] For more details about these traditions, see D. Vidal 1994.

Without fiction, there will be a want of flavour
But too much fiction is the house of sorrow
Fiction should be used in that degree
That salt is used to flavour flour.[49]

TRUTHS IN CONFLICT

One concern of the British in India, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, was to combat practices that they found morally repugnant and contrary to what they thought of as 'civilized behaviour'. There is an extremely abundant literature on the impact of the attempts they made to prohibit *sati* rituals.[50] Rajasthan was not exempt from this reforming policy, although it was handled prudently, by seeking the agreement and support of the local rulers; for in principle it was against the official policy of the British to interfere in the internal affairs of the kingdoms. This accounts for some frictions which occurred within the colonial administration when certain officials pushed their reforming zeal too far.[51] Nevertheless over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century laws were gradually passed in the various kingdoms of the region prohibiting practices which were repugnant to the British moral sense. It has not been sufficiently stressed, I feel, that most of the practices targeted in this way not only conflicted with the colonizers' ideas about morality; many of them were also used as tools of truth in the context of local culture. This obviously applies to ordeals, but also to suicides of bards and Brahmins. And although this is less obvious, notions of truth were also deeply involved in the cremation of widows, where their destiny as married women was at stake.[52] It is not surprising that this correlation went unnoticed by the colonizers. Their concepts of truth were too far removed from the criteria prevailing in the local society.

We may take as an example, the opinions expressed at the beginning of the twentieth century by an investigator and scholar as scrupulous as Tessitori. He could not find terms strong enough

[49] A.K. Forbes 1924.

[50] See for example A. Nandy 1980.

[51] See the initial divergence of views between C. Thoresby and J. Ludlow on the subject of reforms, in V.K. Vashishta 1978.

[52] C. Weinberger-Thomas 1989.

to condemn the disregard for objective truth the bards seemed to manifest. He felt that anything in Rajasthani literature that harboured a trace of authenticity must be the result of Islamic influence. He also suggested, apparently on not much evidence, a hypothesis that the more realistic chronicles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could not have been compiled by authors from the traditional bardic communities. He accused the bards, on the contrary, of having rapidly corrupted this realistic trend, by diluting it in their later productions, dating from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[53] This view shows incomprehension of the central role played by different criteria for truth in the cultural tradition of the region – a tradition of which the bards were the principal guardians. To this basic incomprehension was added the process described in the Introduction to this book of the transfer of knowledge, begun by Tod and other historians in the nineteenth century on the basis of the contents of the bardic chronicles. And most of all, there was the progressive challenging of all the privileges and traditional resources that had been enjoyed by the bards.

This policy of the colonial authorities, even in the provinces, where it was always deliberately restrained, had the effect of casting the cultural and economic bases underlying forms of memory and truth that were characteristic of existing society into a state of crisis.

This fact has been veiled; for in the research of recent decades, stress has been too exclusively laid upon changes in traditions more directly related to Brahmin ideology. Some of these underwent a paradoxical revival under the impact of colonialism. Srinivas was one of the first to understand the importance of this and to analyse its sociological implications; while the research of Bernard Cohn, Christopher Bayly and others, are reconstituting the historical process.[54] This was true, for example, of the caste system, which tended to become more rigid in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; or of Hinduism, which increased in vitality over the same period. In Rajasthan, this happened to the

[53] See L.P. Tessitori 1919.

[54] C. Bayly 1988; B. Cohn 1987; M.N. Srinivas 1962.

Rajput states, which enjoyed a sort of renaissance in the shadow of British influence. But although these phenomena are significant, they should not make us forget the other side of the picture.

All the examples we know of show that the beginning of this century was a time of crisis in the value systems characteristic of existing society. The Morvada incident discussed in this chapter is a good example of this, and especially significant in being an extremely localized incident, in a region that as a whole has 'no history': the most rural part of India.

This incident testifies to the collapse of the value system that had given the Charans their status of 'masters of truth', to use Marcel Detienne's fine expression. So much so, that the very practices which had been used by the bards to guarantee their status were now turned against them. It was no longer Charans threatening to commit suicide, but their opponents who pretended that that they had used this threat, as a cover for their own actions. As in the case of noble revolts, the traditional practices of the Charans had now become weapons in the hands of their opponents.

The macabre pretence to which the government forces lent themselves also reveals something else: it conformed to criteria which no longer relied on ancient traditions of truth. On the contrary, it was based on the wish to fabricate a version of events that would satisfy new criteria for validation, corresponding to norms acceptable to the colonial authorities and based on personal testimony and physical evidence. This explains the process – most certainly repugnant to people of Hindu culture – of half-burning the corpse of an old woman, in order to obtain supporting testimonies. This pretence failed only because the Charans themselves took up the same evidential logic. They too had hidden a corpse – again contrary to the traditional custom of immediately burning dead bodies – to provide evidence of what really happened. With the assistance of the Thakurs' lawyer, they too took care to collect a considerable number of written testimonies to support to their version of the facts.

Should this incident be seen as simply an indication of a transition from one register of truth to another? Yet again, the reality seems to be more complex. This incident does not just demonstrate the collapse of a traditional value-system; it also shows the limitations of the new rules of truth championed by the colonial powers. The government troops not only deny traditional

values by this fake suicide: the values of truth which the colonial administrators claim to uphold are equally travestied; for they in turn decide not to denounce the imposture, for purely pragmatic reasons: instead they will endorse the government's lies, and thus undermine their own moral stance.

We may note too that the Morvada incident, although an extreme case, was not an isolated example. Also in Sirohi in the same year and the same context, some Brahmin communities used the very methods that the Charans were accused of. Only in this case, all the evidence agrees that events did in fact take a traditional turn. The Brahmin communities of two villages (Rajgar Brahmins in Bhitrot and Rawai) performed a hunger strike for one week in front of the ruler's palace, to protest, like so many other people, against the removal of land-related privileges they had traditionally enjoyed. Then they incited an old woman to perform *sati* after taking opium. They were then arrested and tried, but were released soon afterwards by the ruler. This incident occurred shortly after the one at Morvada.[55]

In 1933, Brahmins of the same community but a different village (the Rajgar Brahmins of Manadar) made use of a similar procedure. In this case they were in conflict with a local noble, the Thakur of Manadar, whom they accused of having stolen some cattle from them, and of demanding services that they normally would not have to render. After unsuccessfully performing a public fast in protest *(dharna)*, their leader killed himself with a dagger in front of the village temple.[56] His grandfather and his mother did the same. The British administrator who was sent to the spot tried to smooth over the affair; he made considerable concessions to the Brahmins, with the ruler's agreement. But he also demanded removal of the stone which had been erected like a funerary stele on the spot where the Brahmin died.

Nor had the Brahmins and Charans totally given up their traditional function of chroniclers to the ruler. But in the 1930s they began to exercise their talents in a new framework, that of the nationalist press. We shall look in more detail at the way in which the nationalist movement developed in Sirohi, but here we can give a simple indication. In the course of a stormy session of

[55] Rajgur Brahmins, S.A.R., S.P., basti 17, Makhma Khas.
[56] N.A.I., F.P., f. 304, P, 1933.

the kingdom's reformist and nationalist association (the Sirohi Rajya Praja Mandal)[57] which was based in Bombay at the time, Vallabhai Patel, criticizing the attitude of the Sirohi militants, accused them of wasting their time trying to hound the ruler of this little kingdom with their resentments, by the sole means of a press campaign. To which the militants retorted:

> The leaders of the Congress are censuring us, telling that we are Bhats and Charans and look at things standing at a distance. It is true we are distant from the field of fight. But we do not believe that we are not going to get anything by attending at a distance. We do not believe that till we have no mind to snatch the powers of the Viceroy, the power of this King will not go and we should go on suffering. In order to ruin the administration of the sinful, the publication is necessary.[58]

From the beginning of the 1920s, and throughout the 1930s, one observes a great confusion in the values that served as references in the innumerable internal conflicts agitating Indian society, right down to the most local level. This is all the more striking because it was no longer, as it had been earlier, just a matter of confrontations between well-defined groups of protagonists, each reasoning on the basis of distinct value-systems. In the first decades of the twentieth century, it was not only in Calcutta, Madras or Bombay and amongst a few privileged classes, that a complex interaction between the value-systems of colonizers and colonized was being played out. Certainly the rhetoric of colonization continued to present the tenets of progress and civilization, like crusaders charged with reforming populations bogged down in their ancient traditions, ignorance and superstition. But as the examples described above show, what was happening was a confused entanglement of values and behaviours which left neither traditional standards nor those introduced by the colonizers unaffected. Both were used in turn, often quite cynically, by all parties, according to the needs of the moment. This, as I have tried to show, was particularly the case in everything relating to the values of truth, and all the traditions that made it possible to justify and legitimize, or, on the contrary to condemn, different uses of violence within society.

[57] This was formed in Bombay in 1934. Its leader, Gokulbhai Bhatt, a friend of Patel, remained uncontested leader of the nationalist movement within the kingdom up to Independence.

[58] *Bombay Samachar*, 27 June 1936.

The hypothesis that I want to suggest, which of course needs to be confirmed in detail, is the following: the popular success of Gandhism in the 1920s must be connected, it seems to me, with the way in which the colonizers had challenged traditional uses of violence and truth in Indian society, whether this violence was directed against others, as by the Rajputs, and as we shall see in the next chapter, by the tribal groups, or self-directed, as by the Brahmins and bards. The progressive pacification of civil society had far-reaching consequences, the first of which was to weaken the traditional balances of power on which the society was founded, such as for example the one which had existed between rulers and nobles in Rajasthan. This point has usually been overlooked because in recent studies, especially those by anthropologists, the accent has been laid upon a peaceful image of civil society and the caste system, where a balance between different castes and communities resulted from a shared ideological structure. But the significance of the colonial impact is also due to the fact that it caused the value-system on which this balance was founded to be called into question. This is particularly clear in the case of the Charans and the Morvada incident. Not only the use of violence, but the whole complex of practices linked with the concept of truth were being revalued.

As we have seen, the classes who were most affected by these changes did not remain passive for long. Although right up to Independence they continued to use traditional means of pressure to defend themselves, they also began to look for alternatives. The most obvious one was to accept the new rules of the game, making use of lawyers or journalists, for example; another, used by the Sirohi nobles, was acts of resistance, such as their attack on the mail or their refusal to recognize the new ruler, which would not expose them so directly to reprisals from the local authorities or the colonizers. And it is noteworthy that it was in this context, as is demonstrated by the first meeting of Gandhi and the nobles, that the first links were established between these local events and the nationalist movement.

But perhaps the most interesting thing is that Gandhi's teachings and precepts for action were very much in line with the alternative that many people were looking for. One cannot help remarking that the whole doctrine of Gandhism also rests on a far-reaching reconstruction of the concepts of violence and truth. So perhaps

we can see gradually emerging a possible explanation for the success of Gandhism at this period. This, anyway, is the hypothesis whose plausibility I would like to bring out in the course of this essay.

As has often been noted, the forms of non-violence *(ahimsa)* advocated by Gandhi echoed forms of conduct that had always been part of the defenses used by Brahmins and bards. On the other hand, the practices preached by Gandhi no longer made any reference to the status of those who used them, nor to any kind of sacred inspiration. Similarly Gandhi's concept of truth should not be confused with the traditional forms I have attempted to describe: it was no longer exclusive to a few privileged individuals who alone were considered competent to validate and communicate it. Nor was it any kind of objective statement. It was an experience that was accessible to all, but also impossible to transmit, for each individual must experience it and express it in his own way.

One central theme of the colonizers' ideology was a systematic disqualification of any form of traditional recourse to violence as a means of exerting pressure in conflict situations. Their objective was to assure for themselves a monopoly over 'legitimate' violence; but this was done in the name of a declared intention to pacify and gradually transform civil society. The effectiveness of Gandhi's rhetoric lay not in contesting this ideology, but radicalizing it, so that instead of being a way of guaranteeing the perpetuation of the colonial order, it became a way of undermining it. When the British used force, they would now find themselves more and more clearly in a position of guilt, according to the very criteria of behaviour that they claimed to be guided by.

Gandhism offered communities under attack new possibility to escape from the dilemma in which colonial authority had often trapped them; it offered them responses that did not form part of their traditional logic, but which also did not put them on ground already defined by the colonial government. Bringing people to this intermediate position, as we shall see, was what the nationalist militants tried to do, playing quite successfully the role of a third party in clashes between the existing order and the emerging one.

5

The Mediators: The Motilal Movement

The Concept of a 'Tribe'

Today the question is settled: the concept of a 'tribe' is of little value to anthropology, in India or anywhere else. In Sirohi, for example, the same generic term *(jati)* was often used to refer indiscriminately to castes or tribes.[1] Nevertheless it is difficult to avoid. Its consistent use by the colonial authorities has given it an undeniable sociological content, especially since the same category was taken over without much modification after Independence and still plays a key role in defining social groups classified as such by the British (the 'scheduled tribes'). From a historical standpoint it does not make much sense to use different terms, as some social scientists have done who nowadays prefer to use *'adivasi'* or *dalit;* for these too have acquired distinctive connotations. It will be more helpful to examine what lies behind the label.

Use of the word 'tribe' posed no problems to the colonial authorities. For a long time it was utilized indiscriminately for any social group that was relatively closed and marked by distinctive characteristics, from Brahmin or Rajput clans to groups of nomads or hunter-gatherers. Later, as colonial anthropology developed in the course of the nineteenth century, the term came to be used from an evolutionist standpoint: it then referred to people who

[1] This local use of the term *jati* with reference to tribal communities limits the sociological usefulness of analyses that lay too much stress on old terminological distinctions, like the one often made, for example, between *jati* and *jana*, the former term being supposed to be used only for distinct communities within the caste system, whereas the second was said to be applicable for groups linked with 'tribes'.

seemed to display both cultural traditions and a level of development belonging to an earlier stage of Indian civilization.[2]

This usage has been reconsidered in the light of modern reassessments of the scholarly traditions of the nineteenth century. In particular, it has been noted that the traditions of so-called tribal groups were quite often less distinct than had been thought from those of other communities that unquestionably belonged to the caste structure. Similarly, theories about the specific origins of these groups were found to be extremely flimsy. So, despite the obviously distinctive features displayed by some of them, it finally had to be asked what was the fundamental distinction between tribal people and other communities which also had special characteristics, but were nevertheless considered as castes. Such considerations apply to the tribal peoples of western India.[3]

Over recent decades many criteria have been suggested, based on the theoretical and sometimes political preferences of different researchers. F.G. Bailey, for example, stresses socio-political criteria, suggesting that the caste-tribe distinction should be seen as a continuum. Louis Dumont, following his own line of research, preferred ideological criteria: tribes could be distinguished from castes only in a negative way, by the fact that their collective identity was shaped by values other than those characteristic of the caste system. Yet other scholars preferred to establish a series of empirical criteria, social as well as economic and cultural, to define the tribal reality.

In a critical work devoted to the whole range of ethnographic writings on the tribal groups of western India, Robert Deliege[4] has taken a position which skilfully combines these different trends. From Bailey he takes the concept of a continuum uniting castes and tribes; but adopting a viewpoint equally close to that of N.K. Bose and André Béteille, he gives this concept an essentially historical significance: the apparent continuity between castes and tribes is, he says, the result of a gradual acculturation of tribal communities by the surrounding society shaped by the caste system. He nevertheless finds it possible and useful to

[2] For a detailed analysis of this concept, and especially of its use in the Indian context, see A. Béteille 1992.

[3] See S.N. Gordon, 'Bhils and the idea of a criminal tribe in nineteenth-century India', in A. Yang (ed.) 1985.

[4] R. Deliege 1985.

postulate the existence of an ideal type corresponding to the concept of a 'tribe', in order to isolate criteria that would clearly distinguish tribal groups from caste society. He defines the Bhils, on the theoretical level, in terms of separation from the surrounding society; but unlike Louis Dumont, he refuses to give preference to any single criteria of differentiation. He underlines distinctive features that are characteristic of the Bhils' way of life.

Each of these approaches has the merit of revealing one aspect or another of the difficulties involved in analysing the status of tribal communities in India. In fact, any attempt to reach a theoretical generalization, as André Béteille has emphasized, must confront the incredible diversity of communities grouped under this heading by the British.[5] In this context, even the least theoretical approach may have some informative value. This is true, for example, of the work of B.L. Meharda, who has made a detailed study of one of the most important tribal groups in Sirohi, the Girasias.[6] He however accords them a distinctiveness that is often contestable, and denied by Deliege, who identifies them simply as a sub-group of the Bhils. I intend to take a different standpoint, examining events in which the tribal people were involved in the first half of this century.

I believe that the existence of the tribes cannot be understood simply as an effect of separation *from* the caste system or the mainstream of Hinduism – at least not in the case of West India, nor in other cases I know of in the Indian Himalayas. Their existence must first be analysed as an effect of separation *within* the wider society. In a region such as Rajasthan, the tribes form part of the society as a whole, and contribute to it in exactly the same way as Rajput forms of authority or the structures of merchant communities. To put this in other words, the particular forms of relationships existing between the tribal people and either the political authorities, or the forms of priesthood institutionalized in Brahminism, are no less characteristic of the structure of Indian society than, for example, the oft-cited complementarity between castes associated with priesthood and those associated with kingship. It is not possible to set tribal communities and caste society

[5] The present list defines four hundred 'tribes' and covers just over fifty million people. (A. Béteille 1992:59).
[6] B.L. Meharda 1985.

in opposition to each other, term for term. Both form part of a larger whole.

This point is more crucial than may be apparent at first sight especially if we want to understand the history of Rajasthan and the changes that took place there in the colonial and modern periods. The presence of the tribes was a key element in the dynamics of political authority, on which, in the final analysis, the social and economic equilibrium of the whole region depended. We have seen that the degree of autonomy between nobles and rulers depended precisely on the capacity of each party to mobilize tribal forces to support them when needed. Moreover borders between kingdoms and areas of political 'no man's land', were almost always controlled by tribal people. But in most cases, their social and cultural features are explained less by the ethnic composition of the people living there, than by geographic factors, and the strategic and economic possibilities these areas provided for the survival and maintenance of people who partially eluded the modes of social organization that had developed in the kingdoms.

What is meant by 'tribal traditions' in a context like this? In approaching this question, I will first take an example from another part of India. In areas of south-eastern Himachal Pradesh where I have worked, there are clans (the Khund Kanets) who have been defined as a distinct population – and not as Rajputs, as they themselves claimed to be – on the grounds that they had maintained a considerable degree of autonomy from the local kingdoms, which formed centres for the regional development of Hinduism; the Khund Kanets on the other hand retained traditions which appear distinctive, but which in fact combine earlier forms of Hinduism with a cultural stock common to most Himalayan populations.

In this case, the primary factor that led the colonial authorities to assign these people a special status was not so much their cultural traditions as their position relative to the regional political system. I think that this has a more general application. If it is necessary to characterize the tribal peoples of India by a really distinctive criterion, I believe it is in this direction that it might be found. Whatever other distinctive features they may possess, the aspect that distinguishes them most effectively from other sections of the population is almost always related, it seems to me, to the specific ways in which they have been able to maintain

their autonomy, not *from* the caste system or Hinduism, but *within* the caste system and the culture of India.

This implies that to understand what the tribal peoples represent, we must first understand one way among others in which some degree of autonomy could be achieved and maintained within Indian society. This is the reason why contemporary studies of the tribal peoples often give an unsatisfying impression. Almost unavoidably, they emphasize the religious, social and cultural traditions that give these communities a more or less distinctive identity. And they usually deplore the threat to these traditions of Hindu acculturation or the influence of the modern world. But these traditions are not always what they are said to be; and when the context which gave them their significance changes, they are just as likely to alter as other traditions that are equally distinctive, but to which less attention is paid because they are practiced among groups identified as castes rather than as tribes. Similarly, customs which are today attributed to a particular tribe may in fact once have been widespread among numerous other communities of the same region. So in this chapter my aim is not so much to assess the distinctiveness of traditions connected with the tribal peoples of western Rajasthan, whether relative to Hinduism in general or to caste society; instead I shall confine myself to pointing out the part played by these people in the changes which the region underwent in the first half of the twentieth century.

THE MEETING-POINT

As we have seen, the early 1920s in Sirohi witnessed revolts by nobles and other castes with land-rights, Brahmins and Charans, who were resisting the ruler's policy of land-tax reform. But in 1922, it was the tribal peoples living in the south-western part of the kingdom who were at the centre of events, when they in turn rebelled against the local authorities and the British. In fact this revolt formed part of a wider rebellion which had developed over the preceding months amongst Bhils in the neighbouring state of Mewar and some other kingdoms. The leader of this movement was Motilal Tejawat, a complex and fascinating figure who was locally identified with Gandhi until the nationalist leader publicly dissociated himself from him.

An analysis of this rebellion enables us to get a clearer picture

of forms of behaviour which defined the relationship of the tribal communities to the rest of the population and to regional political powers. It will also give us a better understanding, on the basis of one precise example, of how a more traditional logic was affected by the presence of a small number of new actors who gave these events a novel significance. These few people, I have called 'the new mediators'.

Describing the course of these events is complicated by a factor that was not so apparent in earlier chapters. This tribal movement cannot be analysed simply as a traditional type of movement onto which a more modern logic was increasingly grafted. Nor are we dealing with a movement that arose amongst tribals and was then 'taken over' by new participants. The general direction of the movement was more ambiguous, for from the beginning, it was both inspired and interpreted on different and often contradictory registers.

A Problem of Historiography

The Bhil revolt of 1922, otherwise known as the Motilal movement, is one of the popular movements mentioned briefly in historical writings on the rise of nationalism in India in the 1920s,[7] and described in more detail in histories of the period in Rajasthan.[8] In these writings the movement is defined mainly in terms of its tribal nature, and is linked with other Bhil revolts which took place in the region around the turn of the century. In fact it is often distinguished on this basis alone from other nationalist movements in the region, such as the Bijolia movement which took place at the same period in a neighbouring district of Mewar, but mobilized people mostly from farming castes.[9]

There is no doubt that at the end of 1921, when the British were really beginning to feel concerned about Motilal's influence, this movement could in fact be defined as an essentially tribal movement. And Motilal was widely described as a disciple of Gandhi who tried to take inspiration from him, although he soon

[7] See for example S. Sarkar 1983:211.

[8] See for example K.S. Saxena 1971; R. Pande 1974 and 1986; R. Pema 1986; L.P. Mathur 1988.

[9] P. Surana 1983.

lost control of events. This is the viewpoint that has most often been expressed by historians.

But this movement had a prehistory, which throws a more complex light on it. Motilal's movement in fact began as a direct off-shoot of the Bijolia movement, led by V.S. Pathik.[10] The original aim of the movement was not only reform in the status of tribal people, but an uprising of the whole population against the tyranny of local nobles and their agents.[11]

MOTILAL TEJAWAT

Motilal Tejawat belonged to a merchant caste. He was a *bania* from a village in Mewar (Kotiari), and worked as representative *(munshi)* for an Udaipur firm in the villages of that kingdom. This automatically put him among the local notability. The acute sense of respectability so highly valued by these merchants was regularly flouted by local Thakurs and their henchmen, as well as by government officials. I shall come back to this point in more detail in the next chapter, when describing the social position of the merchant castes. But I must stress here yet again the combination of violence, threats and paternalism that characterized the relationship of the Rajputs to all the other castes, with the possible exception of Brahmins.

This aspect is too often neglected and must be constantly

[10] Vijay (occasionally Bijay) Singh Pathik (real name, Bhoop Singh, son of a Gujar) was born in 1882. He first allied himself with the extremist wing of the nationalist movement (Sachindra Sayal, R.B. Bose, Barindra Ghose the brother of Sri Aurobindo), and was involved in several terrorist actions (Maniktola bomb conspiracy case 1908; Hardinge bomb case 1912). Fleeing from the Bengal police, he came to work as a militant in Rajasthan under his own name. He was arrested by the British, escaped, and moved around the region, at first disguised as a *sadhu*. From 1916 onwards he joined Sadhu Sita Ram who was leading the Bijolia movement, and gave it a new impulse. See P. Surana 1983.

[11] A new and very valuable light has been cast on the beginnings of the movement by Motilal Tejawat himself, in a manuscript account of the events which his son, Mohan Lal, was kind enough to allow me to consult. K.L. Sharma is one of the few authors to have considered the complex and socially heterogeneous character of 'peasant' movements in Rajasthan. See K.L. Sharma 1986 and 1988.

recalled. Anthropologists have over-emphasized the complementarity of the various castes and the primacy of the sense of hierarchy in Hinduism. All that is more or less true, so long as we do not lose sight of the realities of actual social relations. All the evidence shows that these were based on intimidation, fear and subjection, in one word, on oppression, at least as much as on an ideological consensus about the rights and status of each one. (This remark would apply equally well to the domestic unit, although that is not the theme of this study.)

The Bijolia movement took its stand upon exactly these grounds. It developed in successive phases from 1897 onwards amongst the main farming caste in the *jagir*, the Dhakads. The movement began by challenging the taxes traditionally paid to the *jagir* for every wedding. The Dhakads refused to pay these in future, and threatened to emigrate *en masse* from the *jagir*. After various prevarications, the Thakur finally agreed to abolish the tax. This initial success did much for the growth of the movement. After 1905 it received a decisive push from the militancy of a single man, Sadhu Sita Ram, who extended its organizational base.

One must have met militants of this generation to be able to understand today the exceptional character and the variety of human qualities possessed by some of these men, who played crucial roles at the most local level in the Indian nationalist movement during the first half of the twentieth century. Whatever judgement professional historians may pass upon their role, their memory will always be a honour to the history of this period. Sita Ram, and later V.S. Pathik and Manikyalal Verma, were able to organize, develop and popularize the movement. They also radicalized it and linked it with contemporary developments in the nationalist movement in the rest of India.

A man like V.S. Pathik was able to publicize this movement – despite its very local origin – by establishing the most varied contacts throughout the nationalist movement, organizing a veritable press campaign, and even contacting politicians in England to support his cause. In addition to numerous pamphlets, he also composed poems and songs to spread his movement; and these became very well-known, for he was good at choosing themes that touched people. In 1915 the movement was skilfully relaunched after an incident which took place during the *Ram*

navami procession. It was customary to organize processions with songs and musical instruments for the festival. But after a Thakur died, it was also forbidden by custom to play any musical instrument within his domain for several months.[12] The Bijolia people decided to ignore this prohibition. And when the Thakur's heir tried to punish them, they made great propaganda out of it. Songs composed by V.S. Pathik were disseminated, accusing Thakurs of claiming to be greater than the gods.[13]

So in the years immediately preceding the Motilal movement, a real social and political movement had grown up in Mewar, which combined a theoretical discourse of nationalist and partly Gandhian inspiration with denunciation of the 'feudal' privileges enjoyed by the *jagirdars*. Its inspiration could certainly be described as revolutionary, if not 'bolshevik', as it soon was by the British authorities. The administration were anxious to calm things down, at a time when the whole of India was undergoing its period of greatest upheaval against colonial authority since 1857. The Bijolia movement was temporarily settled with a compromise, orchestrated by the British, between its leaders, the state government and the *jagirdars*, in February 1922. Reaching this compromise was made easier because by this time the British had managed to replace the Maharana of Mewar, a popular but intractable figure, with his son who, like the new sovereign in Sirohi at the same period, had, they hoped, been 'conditioned' to embody a new kind of ruler, more progressive and open for reform. Another factor, as it happened, was the abrupt volte-face of Gandhi, who had just called for the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement throughout India after the incidents of Chauri-Chaura.

The account written by Motilal Tejawat shows that throughout the second quarter of 1921, while he was developing his own movement, he was quite openly taking inspiration from the example of V.S. Pathik, in both methods and ideology. As we

[12] On the acuteness of the conflicts that might arise from public playing of musical instruments in incompatible contexts, see M. Roberts 1990. Although Roberts' argument is extremely interesting, its limitation is that it gives the impression that such conflicts arose only as a result of the British presence. This may be true for Ceylon, but in India 'competition for symbolic space' cannot be considered a creation of the colonial epoch.

[13] Ibid., pp. 70–1.

have said, Motilal came from the Bania caste that was engaged in trade and pawnbroking throughout the region. These people had an ambiguous relationship with the big landowners. Their position was privileged in a sense, since they were usually in charge of managing the *jagirs*, and also acted as bankers for the Thakurs. But, as the only ones with any money or valuables, they were an obvious target for the Thakurs' greed, since it was not very difficult to extort these from them by threats or violence. Neither the Thakurs themselves, their subordinates, nor the officials of the *darbar*, showed much restraint in this. In his narrative Motilal recounts at length all the extortions his family and friends had been victims of. He himself, before starting to organize his movement, had been imprisoned by the Thakur of Jharol because he had refused to succumb to extortions in that village, where he was doing some business on behalf of his wife's family. He did not allow himself to be intimidated. His resistance impressed the villagers, and he began to become popular with everyone who was suffering from the Thakurs' exactions. In his autobiographical account Motilal explains in great detail what the population had to suffer from the local authorities: how low caste people had to work for the Thakur whenever he called them; how the prettiest women were carried off by the jagirdar or his men; how the merchants were exploited; how anyone who resisted was beaten; and how the local officials only enriched themselves and took bribes under the cover of their various responsibilities. The British administrators were misled with shows put on by local officials for their brief and infrequent visits. The people's age-old reaction was to see the ruler himself as the only possible helper – if only he knew what was going on in his kingdom, under cover of his authority! But how could he learn the truth? Courtiers and intriguers were there to prevent it.

As a result of the Bijolia movement, pamphlets were circulating in the kingdom, signed by committees *(panch)*, denouncing the oppression and calling on the villagers to refuse to pay their dues. These were distributed by activists at religious festivals where people from different parts of the kingdom came together, and their contents were the topic of every conversation. After reading one of these pamphlets, Motilal got enthusiastic, made fifty copies of it and began to distribute them himself in Jharol district. This

was a district with a Bhil majority, where the Thakur was particularly detested. Several times Motilal mentions how surprised he was at the unexpected success of his initiative. A first meeting took place at night in a temple in Jharol (Matadevi). Five people from the district were there. From their names it seems these were a *sadhu*, two Brahmins, a blacksmith and a potter. They decided to organize new committees in every village in the kingdom. The movement then really began to take shape; and seeing its success, a second committee was formed to include all the new members, and this was when Motilal became the leader of the movement. The meeting was popular, for according to Motilal almost a thousand people attended it. And it is worth noting – in the light of subsequent events – that in his account Motilal particularly stresses the presence of Brahmins, Mahajans (merchants) and Rabaris (herders).

Over the following months, Motilal and the committee of forty-two people that had been formed set themselves two primary tasks: first to make contact with the other large resistance movement in the kingdom, that had started from Bijolia; and then to put the grievances of the people into the hands of the Maharana of Udaipur in person. They did not want to give up their belief that the ruler was unaware of what was going on in his kingdom; and they hoped that if they succeeded in informing him about it, he would readily give them his support. The section of Motilal's account which covers these few months of activity is fascinating because it gives first-hand evidence of the way in which the spirit of revolt against the existing order could spread right down to the most local level. We read how the committee was usually received with respect by caste or village assemblies. We also see how collective ceremonies and temple festivals provided opportunities for spreading the movement. We see too the importance of holy men, whose blessings or encouragement strengthened the militants' resolution and provided them with a powerful means of propaganda. Motilal and his band went to the little town that housed Eklingi, the tutelary deity of the ruler of Udaipur, who claimed to rule in his name.[14] They were welcomed by a celebrated ascetic of the Gosain sect, Sri Kailash

[14] On the role of this deity in legitimizing the authority of the Raja of Udaipur, see H. Stern 1986.

Nand Puriji, who gave them his blessings and above all, confirmed their faith that their mission was inspired by the gods. Motilal tells us that after this visit, referring to the name of Eklinji was a great help to them:

> That's why I tell you that our only ruler now is Sri Eklinji. . . . On listening to my words, Sri Gusainji was very happy. He encouraged us a lot. He took flowers and made a crown for us which we took to every meeting in order to show that Eklinjinath was with us. It helped us greatly to get the support of everyone.[15]

At last Motilal and his friends went to Udaipur. There they put together a book of complaints *(Mewar Pukar)* in which they recorded in full detail all the misdeeds committed in various parts of the kingdom by State officials or local Thakurs that had been reported to them. They then attempted, without success, to present this book to the Maharana. During this time, when Motilal was launching his activities in Mewar, the British took hardly any notice of him. Nevertheless, they considered his movement part of a general state of rebellion that was more or less latent throughout the kingdom, of which they still saw the Bijolia movement as the centre. British officials were declaring at this time that Mewar had practically become a hotbed of revolution:

> [Mewar is] becoming a hotbed of lawlessness. seditionist emissaries are teaching the people that all men are equal. The land belongs to the peasants and not to the state or landlords. It is significant that the people are being urged to use the equivalent of the word 'comrade'.[16]

Only in September 1921 did the English begin to realize the extent of Motilal's activities. By then he had returned to his native district of Jharol. A reward was offered by the State government for his arrest. One of his partisans had been arrested, and Motilal had tried to free him, accompanied by many followers, mainly Bhils from sixty-five surrounding villages, according to the police.[17] Motilal's prestige increased considerably throughout the whole region, especially among the tribals. At this time he presented himself essentially as a follower of Gandhi. In his speeches he said that when Gandhi was successful, the only tax they would

[15] Motilal Tejawat, Ms.
[16] Wilkinson, Rajputana Agency Report of 921, quoted in S. Sarkar 1983:200.
[17] N.A.I., F., Pol., f. 428, P, 1922–3.

have to pay would be purely symbolic (only one *anna*, one sixteenth of a rupee). Worst of all, the British then discovered that Motilal had succeeded in mobilizing and organizing the Bhils in his own and adjacent districts. A courier system had been set up to carry his messages, and drums were used from village to village to mobilize the whole population very rapidly. The movement had also acquired a strong social and religious cognation among the Bhils. In order to join, an oath had to be taken and those who refused to do this were threatened with social boycott and worse consequences.

Over the following months, the British tried to defuse the movement. They themselves sent the local Thakurs a petition prepared by Motilal on behalf of farmers in the region, and pressed them to proclaim in every village their intention of reducing the number of days of obligatory service *(begar)* they traditionally demanded from their tenants. But tension again increased in December 1921 when one of Motilal's men was murdered by a noble (the Thakur of Madri). Now the British were quite determined to arrest Motilal immediately. But accompanied by several thousand Bhils he crossed the Mewar frontier, and after passing through two other small neighbouring states (Idar and Danta), entered Sirohi. He was heading for Mount Abu, which was a sacred pilgrimage place for the Bhils as well as for Jains and Rajputs. Then the great saga began.

The Oath of Unity

In its early stages, it had in fact been possible to take Motilal's movement for part of the widespread agitation that was prevalent at the time in the kingdom of Mewar. It differed little in either its claims or its methods. But the influence which Motilal gained over the tribals, and perhaps even more, the influence exerted upon him by his followers, resulted in a change in both its tone and its declared objectives. The most varied testimonies, including his own, agree on one point: Motilal was more and more overtaken by the events which he had helped to set in train; moreover, he was ultimately overtaken by the persona he was made into, behind which he almost disappeared in the end. In the eyes of the nationalist militants of the region, Motilal's movement was taking a dangerous turn. But understanding the direction of this

'turn' gives us an opportunity to examine some fundamental mechanisms in the realities of tribal life.

In the course of the Bijolia movement, V.S. Pathik and his militants had practically succeeded in replacing the power of the Thakurs by an alternative authority system, based on committees responsible for dispensing justice or negotiating the taxes to be paid by farmers. They also organized a militia. This enabled their movement to present itself as an alternative to the existing political and social system. The existing 'feudal system' was denounced in overtly political terms which, although often making use of religious symbolism, appealed to modern values and a reforming spirit directly inspired by the nationalist movement.

Motilal's movement, which started from a similar inspiration, was quickly absorbed into a different order of ideas. The same refusal to submit any longer to the demands of local Thakurs and the ruler in matters of authority, traditional services, or taxation, rapidly took on another significance. In this case, the abuses of the local authorities were denounced less as the result of an old order that was naturally oppressive, than as the outcome of a modern perversion of the system. What was needed was not the emergence of a new order, but a return to an idealized version of the traditional one. And it was rumoured that if the existing rulers refused to return to the path of justice, Motilal would establish a new kingdom, in which the Bhils would at last be freed from oppression.

Although he tended to deny it later, there is no doubt that Motilal at first went along with this idea. Under danger of arrest, he moved only in the company of armed Bhils, who numbered in their thousands. For several months he and his partisans wandered around in the inaccessible hilly areas that now form the frontier between Rajasthan and Gujarat, and which then bordered the kingdoms of Mewar, Sirohi, Idar, Danta and Palampur. Wherever the impromptu army halted, Motilal's camp was visited by tribal people offering him the traditional homage normally reserved for local chieftains or for deities: the gift of a coconut and a rupee. These visitors joined the movement in large numbers, taking a solemn oath in a way that is common in the region, holding a sword in the hand. They vowed to respect all the decisions and actions of Motilal, and never by their actions break the unity of the movement. So the movement became

widely known as *eki* (or *eka)*, which literally means 'unity', referring to the oath which bound all its members.

The Effect of Deterritorialization

Before the arrival of the British, the hilly areas controlled by the tribes presented a special situation in the political geography of the region. They were usually situated on the borders of kingdoms, and their populations owed only very nominal allegiance to neighbouring rulers. This was especially true of the tribal groups who formed the majority there, but also, to a lesser extent, of local Thakurs who had carved out fiefs for themselves in these isolated areas. It was not considered safe to go there without protection, and even rulers or their representatives rarely did so except when accompanied by a large armed force. Local history refers with some awe to the tribal peoples' ability to wipe out large armed bands in the hills. The nature of the terrain helped them at least as much as their skill in self-defence; they were ready to abandon their villages and take up a guerilla-like campaign against all intruders on their territory. As these were mainly hilly regions and infertile forests, rulers preferred to let things be and contented themselves with the nominal allegiance of these communities, granting them specific privileges in exchange. They left it to the customary chiefs to collect the taxes they required from them, or to decide who could or could not settle in their villages. It was also accepted that these tribal groups would levy their own taxes on passing travellers, mainly merchants, or herdsmen with their animals, in return for safe conduct through the territory controlled by each group. In addition it was not unusual for the tribals to demand a tribute *(chauth)* from nearby villages, simply threatening to pillage them if they did not pay.[18]

So when the British wanted to strengthen their control over Rajasthan, these tribal regions presented one of the main obstacles to the order they wanted to establish; especially since in troubled times – which prevailed throughout the eighteenth century – these areas which had always been used as a refuge, often served as bases for armed bands who mounted plundering raids and exacted tribute in neighbouring parts of the plains.

[18] See for example J.C. Brookes 1859; and on the spread of these practices under the Marathas see S.N. Gordon 1994.

Another concern of the British at this time was to fix precisely once and for all the borderlines between the kingdoms so that every region would be the responsibility of a clearly-defined authority. But as they were aware of the difficulty experienced by local governments in exercising control over these territories, they developed a special policy. This was based on a more general model that they had gradually adopted for dealing with populations that they labelled as 'criminal'.[19] They set up garrisons of forces recruited from the local tribal population under their own command, thus placing these areas more or less explicitly under their own authority. In this part of the Aravallis they formed a Bhil regiment in 1841, commanded by British officers, and stationed at three strategic sites to control the hills.[20] After spending a great deal of energy on clearly redefining the borders, they also tried to moderate the authority of isolated lords among the hills who until then had acted more or less as they wished. And lastly, they pressed the rulers responsible for these territories to establish effective authority over them, particularly by setting up permanent police posts *(thana)*.

As may be imagined, this policy was not appreciated by the local people. Their main fear was that their sons would be taken from them and sent to serve far away, in the colonial wars or the First World War. The Bhils also violently and successfully resisted census and land survey operations in this area. They rightly thought that these control measures could only harm them and weaken whatever autonomy they still enjoyed.

As a result, throughout the whole of the nineteenth century and the early decades of this one, few years passed without more or less serious incidents occurring in the tribal areas. In 1922, the previous incident had taken place nine years before, in the districts of Mewar kingdom where the Bhils lived. In Sirohi, the Girasia, the dominant community amongst the tribal people of the hills, had successfully opposed the survey operations, as the nobles did later.

We have seen how revolts by nobles were deeply rooted in their traditions, playing a key role in the definition of their status. The same applies equally to the tribal peoples. By rebelling, the

[19] On various aspects of this policy of classifying population groups, see A. Yang 1985.

[20] On the establishment of the Mewar Bhil Corps, see J.C. Brookes 1859, Chapter V; L.P. Mathur 1988.

nobles tried to prevent any territorial reorganization which would be to their disadvantage. When they could not defend their strongholds they would temporarily abandon them, but did not leave the area; and then they were all the more troublesome because they could not be pinned down.

The technique used by the tribals was not very different, except that they cared little for strongholds, and would simply abandon their villages, leaving their enemies only the satisfaction of burning them. Unlike the nobles, who formed only small armed bands, they were entire populations, and could rapidly assemble a very large number of armed men at any point of their territory.

This was how, wherever he went, Motilal's movement could mobilize thousands of partisans, without the British ever being sure of their movements, or even of where they really were. During the most active phase of the movement, Motilal's partisans were shifting around constantly in these hills, passing from one kingdom to another, not allowing the authorities any time to organize against them. From January to April 1922, they were coming and going continuously between the kingdoms in the area (Mewar, Sirohi, Idar, Danta, Palampur), avoiding any large concentrations of troops sent against them, but attacking isolated patrols in brief skirmishes where they always had a large advantage of numbers. Not only did this mobility hamper the governments of the various kingdoms, whose authority was always limited to their own territories; it was equally effective in disorganizing the colonial government, as is abundantly shown in British archives. Each administration, and each official in the field, required the strictest respect of their prerogatives. They frequently differed amongst themselves about the line to be taken against Motilal and his partisans, and this led to confusion and long delays before the colonial authorities could decide how to return to the attack. And as several officials bitterly remarked, the problem could have been settled on several occasions if their recommendations had been carried out immediately.

So Motilal's movement, especially during this second phase, was far from demonstrating the irrationality that everyone, British and nationalist militants alike, accused it of later.

In fact it was a tremendous reaction on the part of the tribal

people of the region, who united to regain their autonomy by trying to resist the various bodies for controlling land and population that had been set up in their hills, both by local authorities and the British.

We could give several examples of this: among the various agents who tried to impose some degree of control over their territories, the ones most unanimously detested by the tribals were not – as might appear from the rhetoric used by Motilal or other militants – the British, nor the local chiefs, nor the rulers of neighbouring kingdoms. It was local officials of various kinds, and above all the police officers, who were hated by all on account of their incessant abuses of power. For this reason, throughout the 1922 movement, the police posts that had been set up with some difficulty by the rulers on the recommendation of the British were the favoured targets of Motilal and his partisans. The British and the higher echelons of the State governments did in fact admit that these abuses by local officials took place. This allowed them to explain, at little cost to themselves, the spontaneity and violence of the tribal revolt.

Many other factors were involved, however, as is shown by the attitude of Motilal and his followers towards the Bhil regiments, recruited and commanded by British officers. The Bhils had always dreaded forcible conscription into these regiments, and this feeling had grown more acute during the First World War when these troops were sent to fight on distant fronts such as Mesopotamia. Motilal's men knew these soldiers personally, and were connected to many of them by kinship and neighbourhood ties. So they felt sure that if they came into direct confrontation with them, the soldiers would lower their arms and make common cause with them. On 22 March 1922, Motilal, with about ten thousand men armed with bows and arrows plus a few guns, met the Mewar Bhil Corps, under the command of a British officer. A Brahmin from Motilal's village, who had been sent by the British to spy out his movements, reports the incident, which led to about twenty deaths:

> The Pal Bhils who were around Motilal said that among the Paltan Mewar Bhil Corps were their brethren who would not kill them and that there was no reason for fear, adding that they would join their *aiki* [union]. One fat *sadhu* named Gyanji who was standing by Motilal stepped forward a little to ascertain whether the sepoys were in *aiki* and

Plate 1: Colonial representation of 'tribes' (Mina and Girasia) in Sirohi in 1895.

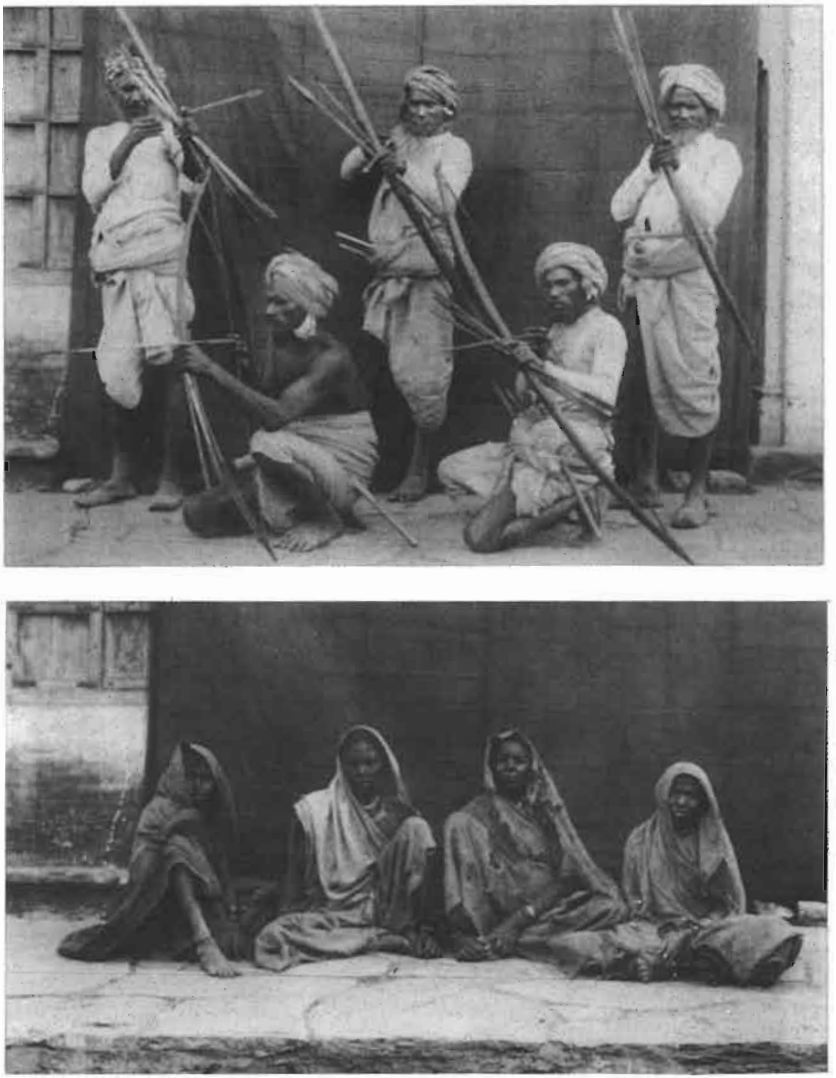

Plate 2: Colonial representation of a 'criminal tribe' (Bhil) of Sirohi in 1895.

Plate 3, Above: Rajputs of Sirohi in 1895.
Left: Sarup Singh.

Plate 4, Left: Captain Pritchard, 1902.
Below, left: James Tod at work.
Below, right: Vijay Singh Pathik.

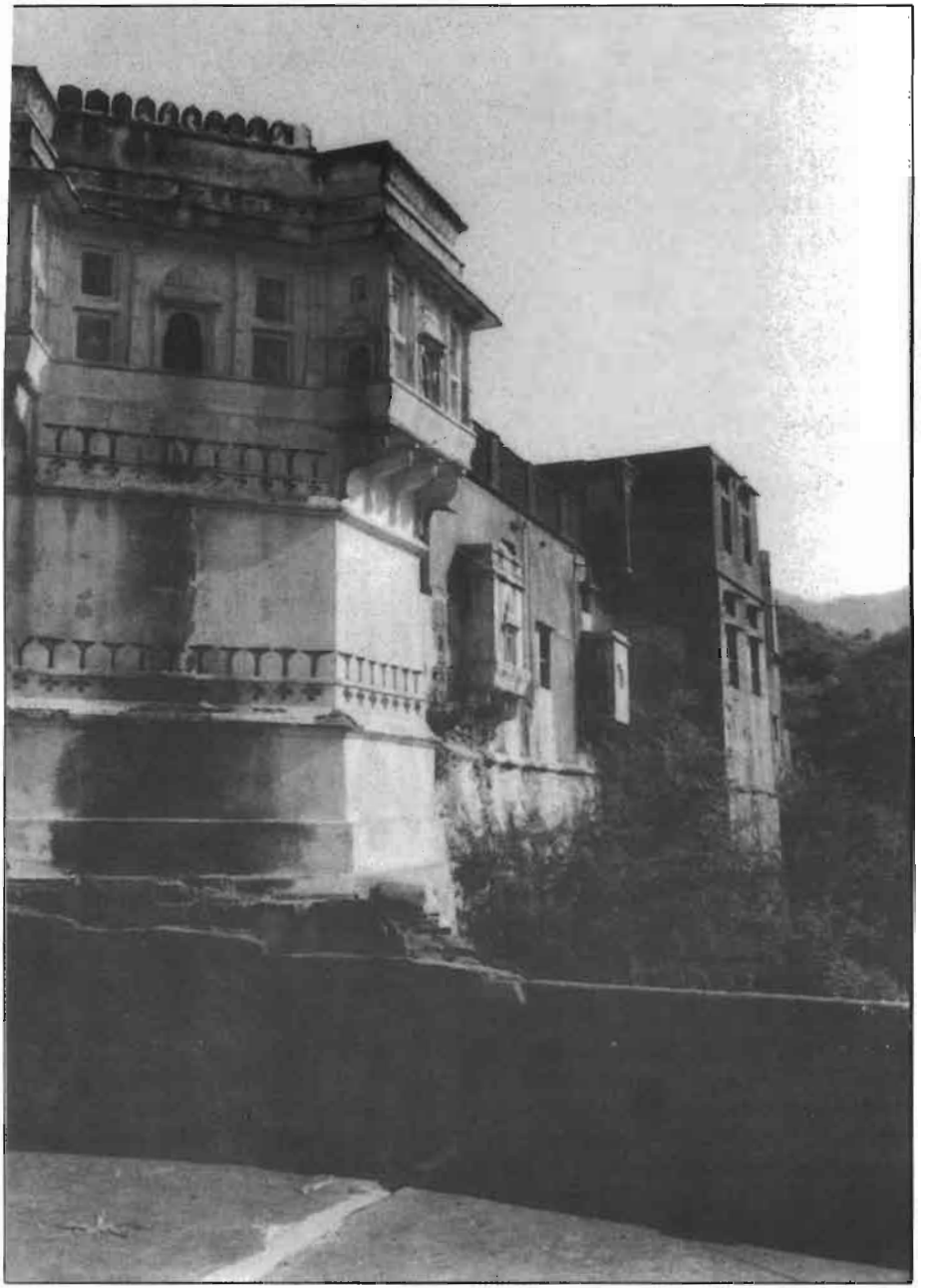

Plate 5: The house of the *thakur* of Nibaj.

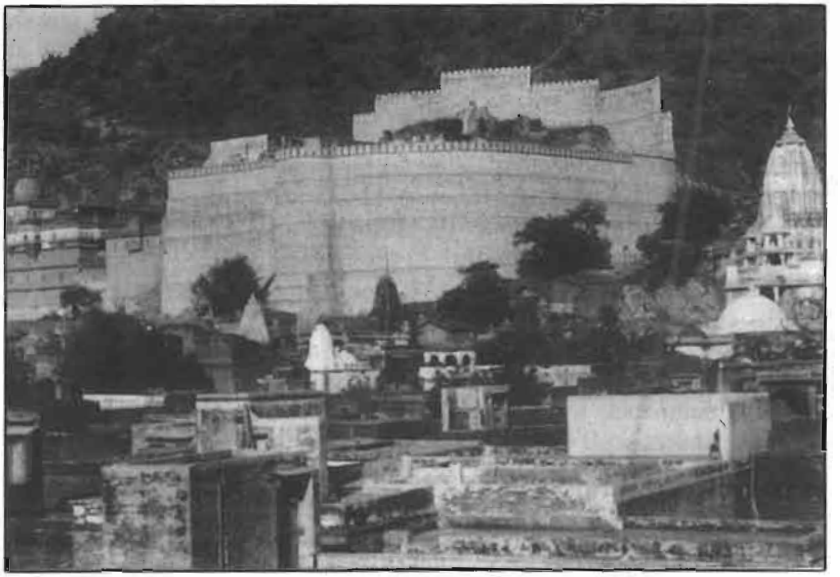

Plate 6, Above: The old fortress and the Jain temples in Sirohi town in 1895.
Below: State Cavalry of Sirohi, 1895.

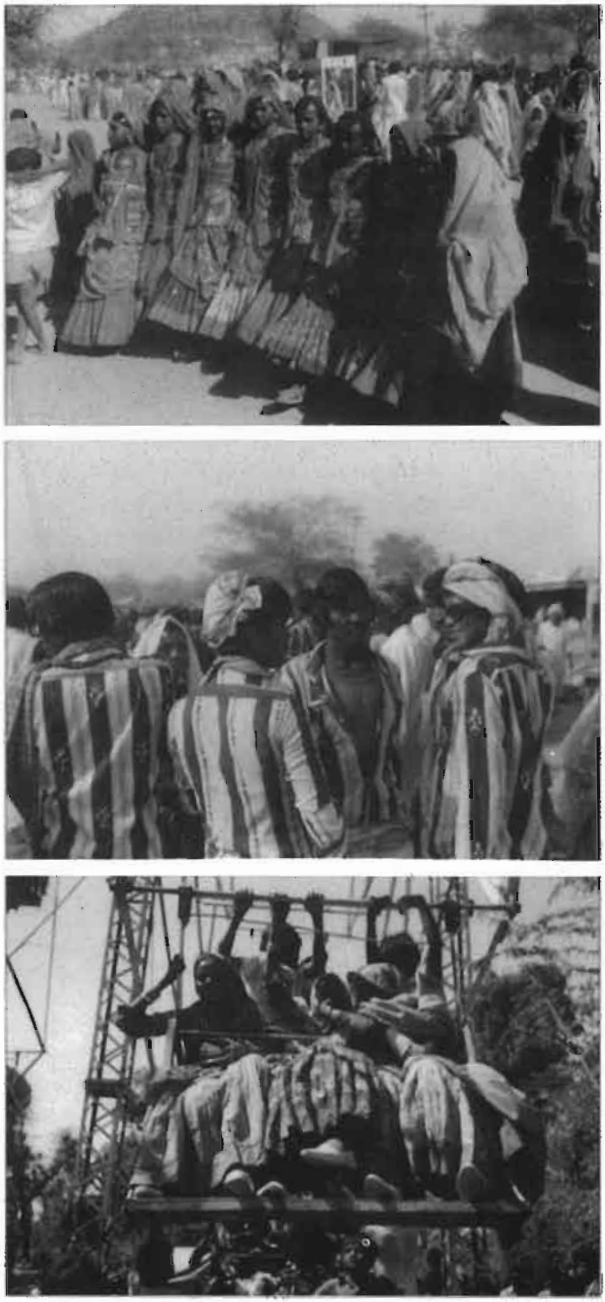

Plate 7: Village Fair in Sirohi, 1989.

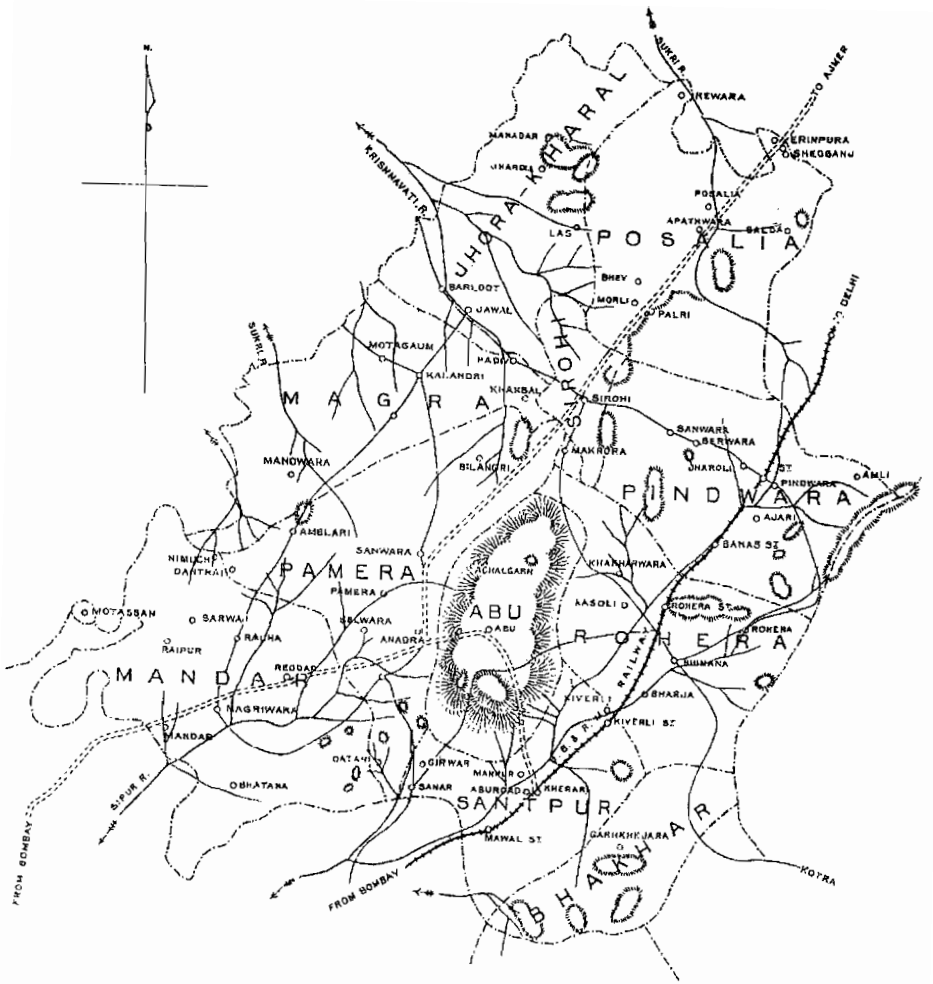

Plate 8: Sirohi Kingdom.

turning round indicated by a motion of his hands that they should oppose the corps as the Sepoys of the Corps were not in *aiki*. Immediately, a few men drawing out their swords and uttering the word *phoire, phoire* (a word encouraging men to fight) asked 200–300 Bhils to run away and Motilal and the remainder to string arrows. All the Bhils at once took up their bows and arrows, commenced firing and stepped forward with shouts of *phoire, phoire*.[21]

There was also some ambiguity in the attitude of Motilal's movement towards the local rulers. Motilal himself constantly alternated between statements of antagonism and a continued hope that the rulers would adopt a more sympathetic attitude towards him and the tribal people. One of the movement's central claims was their refusal to pay land-taxes at the new rate fixed by the government. This was one of the main arguments used by Motilal to mobilize the tribals. Wherever he went, he urged them to refuse to pay anything more than the extremely small sum that had been required from them before the new tax-reforms inspired by the British authorities. In Sirohi, the precise strategy recommended by Motilal to his partisans was the following: they should pay, strictly in kind, the share of the harvest traditionally reserved for the ruler. If this was accepted, they had no need to do anything further. But if this was refused by the government officials as insufficient, they must go all together to the temple of Sarneshwarji (the tutelary deity of the ruler), a few kilometres from the capital. There they must offer the State's portion of the harvest to the deity. And then they should just eat it up themselves on the spot. Then they would have fulfilled their obligations. And if the State then used force to try and seize the revenue it claimed, they must try to resist by all means. Rather than yield to violence, they should, as a last resort, flee the kingdom and take to the hills, where with Motilal's help they would found a new kingdom.[22]

THE HYPOTHETICAL KINGDOM

Did Motilal really, during these few months, envisage the possibility of founding a new kingdom? This is what the British

[21] Statement of Ted Chand, son of Ratan Lal Brahman, N.A.I., F., Pol., f. 428, P, 1922–3:47.

[22] On Motilal's recommendations, see for example the statement of Grassia Rupa, son of Kana, aged twenty-five years, of Bula, ibid., p. 61.

believed, and so did Gandhi. And people who were there at the time have confirmed to me that this rumour was current in the tribal areas. It seems that two quite different kinds of phenomena were combined here. As we have noted, Motilal took much of his inspiration from V.S. Pathik and the Bijolia movement. In 1921 Pathik had argued for the establishment of a complete system of local government by the people, to replace the existing system. Motilal had taken up this idea, and in villages where he found the populace receptive he appointed new people to the posts and offices traditionally occupied by officials of the regional kingdoms. This kind of action took on a new significance in predominantly tribal districts.

Various different kinds of foundation myths account for the special position of the tribal peoples in society. Some of these are based on mythical events more or less within the traditions of Hindu polytheism. But side by side with these myths there is another tradition, of a more 'historical' kind, which sees the tribal peoples as 'defeated' communities who fled to the hills after the Rajput clans took over the region and built up the kingdoms; or as remnants of earlier Rajput clans that had lost power to others. In Sirohi, for example, the Girasias felt themselves superior to the Bhils because many of them continued to identify themselves as descendants of Rajput clans such as the Paramars or Solankis, who had ruled in this area before the Deora Chauhans.[23]

So the idea of regaining power and founding their own kingdom, particularly among these people who were used to defending their autonomy by the use of arms, and levying their own taxes, took on a traditional connotation. And it is easy to understand how this was easily mistaken for a more modern kind of ambition, to form a government controlled by the people themselves.

THE CHARACTER OF MOTILAL

We find a similar ambiguity in Motilal's persona. We have seen that he initially conceived his role as very close to that of V.S. Pathik, who clearly defined his activities within the framework of the nationalist movement, while highlighting the oppressive and 'feudal' nature of the tyranny to which the local people

[23] B.L. Meharda 1985, Chapter 2.

were subjected. Here again it seems that Motilal's persona was very soon interpreted in a more complicated way.

Strange rumours circulated about him. It was sometimes said that he had come down from a comet to help the Bhils.[24] He was also believed to have said that if his followers were attacked by soldiers, they had nothing to fear because their adversaries' guns would shoot only water; but any guns they could seize would be automatically reloaded – they only had to lower them towards the ground.[25]

On the other hand, Motilal was often connected with Gandhi or, it would be more correct to say, was often identified with him. One of the main difficulties in interpreting Motilal's persona comes from the fact that he later defined himself only as a disciple of Gandhi, eager to follow his precepts and directives to the letter, as his correspondence shows. But in the early months of 1922, when his movement was at its apogee, there is no doubt that his image was much less clear. Perhaps it would not be incorrect to say that at this time his reputation was based on at least four different and more or less contradictory figures: first, that of a tribal leader, possessing magic powers and heralding a new era; before him, crowds prostrated themselves, presenting offerings and joining his movement after taking an oath. Then, that of the organizer of a rebellion against the power of the nobles and rulers, who took his inspiration from the methods of V.S. Pathik, forming local assemblies of villagers and tribals to investigate their grievances, and encouraging them to resist the authorities and appoint their own local officials. But also that of a hesitant human being who was himself not always sure whether he should think of the ruler of Udaipur as his last hope of help, or as his enemy. And lastly that of someone identified with Gandhi, the only role he later acknowledged, a sort of social worker, whose only aim was to improve conditions for the tribal people and reform their customs.

The combination of these different images explains how Motilal could be perceived by the British as a bolshevik and revolutionary agitator, but at the same time as a mere schemer, misusing the naivete of the tribals, a man whom they hoped to be able to

[24] S.A.R., S.P., sr. 1, f. 367, 1922.
[25] Ibid.

bribe,[26] or again as a naive idealist who believed he was doing the best for the tribals, although he was in fact acting against their true interests.

It should also be noted that the nationalist militants who intervened in the second stage of the movement held remarkably similar views about Motilal. V.S. Pathik and Mani Lal Kothari, whom Gandhi personally sent to the spot, both agreed with the English on at least one point: Motilal was an ambiguous figure to say the least, and the first thing to be done was to remove him from leadership of the movement.

All this would be of only anecdotal interest were it not for the fact that behind the ambiguities of Motilal's persona lies a much more fundamental paradox and truth. It is the great merit of the historians of the *Subaltern Studies* school to have demonstrated two things that are essential to an understanding of this period: first the fact, which has already been mentioned, that there was a constellation of regional leaders who were identified with Gandhi, and who spread and increased his reputation while incarnating him locally; but above all, and perhaps this is the essential thing, that Gandhi's own image was not free from the same kind of ambiguity that we have mentioned in describing Motilal. In an excellent study of the role of the Mahatma in Gorakhpur district, Shahid Amin has shown, for example, that his image was in fact much closer to that of someone like Motilal than to the one he would most certainly preferred to restrict himself to.[27] In particular we find very similar rumours, both about the miraculous powers attributed to him, and about the new 'Raj' he would establish.

So yet again we should mistrust the ever-present temptation, which appears even in recent works by historians, to distinguish 'tribal revolts' from 'peasant revolts' on the grounds of the messianism attributed to their leaders. The difference is to be found rather, as I have tried to show, in a different relationship to the political authorities as traditionally instituted, and as they had been reinforced during the colonial period. Let us now take a look at some traditional reactions aroused by Motilal's movement,

[26] 'It would probably be an excellent thing if the durbar did pay him. It would be a difficult thing for him to make trouble again, if he had taken the durbar's money'. N.A.I., F., Pol., Memorandum n. 54 on the internal situation in Rajputana for the period ending 15th November 1921.

[27] S. Amin 1984.

before analysing in more detail the decisive role played by the people whom I have labelled for convenience 'the new mediators'.

THE BACKLASH OF TRADITION

Motilal's movement aroused the enthusiasm of the tribals; but it also provoked negative reactions, which took various forms. It is interesting first to take a look at one category of participants who reacted to these events in the most traditional possible manner, and whose behaviour can be analysed in the context of a series of incidents which took place in the kingdom of Sirohi.

The Siawa Incidents

It was all very well for the British to mock the tribals' fantasy in hoping that their enemies' guns would fire only water. Colonial fantasy was not very different. It was the British who brought in an armoured vehicle loaded with cannon, justifying its use against a civilian population armed with little more than bows and arrows by its 'moral effect'. In a more general sense too, many of the actions undertaken by British officers on the spot can only be understood in the light of the fantasy which Motilal's movement represented to them. Despite the greater political intelligence of some of them, the invisible presence in the hills of thousands of tribals, whose nearness was signalled by drumming which they interpreted as war-drums, called up images that often overcame their better reason.[28] They reacted in terms of images that had marked the earliest stages of colonization in the region. The events which occurred at Siawa, about 20 kilometres from the important railway station of Abu Road, are a perfect example of this.

This was a hilly region inhabited almost exclusively by Girasias. Few people ventured off the road which led to a famous pilgrimage place in the area, sacred to the goddess Ambaji. Communications between the tribal communities and the State government remained very sporadic and were conducted through communities of bards. For this reason the area long remained *terra incognita* to the British.

Only fifty years earlier the Resident in the kingdom could boast

[28] On British stereotypes in India, see S. Chakravarty 1991.

of being the first European to explore the area. He had passed through it at the head of an armed detachment which included some Thakurs and more than a thousand men, accompanied by the Raja, whose authority he wanted to establish in an area which he described in these terms:

> Up to the beginning of this year, little if anything was known of this country or its inhabitants. The latter were said to be jealous of intrusion, and to have more than once effectually prevented the entrance of a force by barring their passes. Wonderful tales were told of their strength and lawlessness; of the celerity with which they assembled; and how a few beats of the country drums repeated over the mountain ranges could, in an incredibly short space of time, collect at any one spot hundreds of their clans. No raj official ventured inside; no dues, revenues or tribute were paid by its people, who owned but a nominal allegiance to the Durbar. Here, however, the outlaw felt he had a safe asylum. All communications between the State and the unruly occupants of the Bhakur were carried through Charuns, whose interest it was to maintain a state of things which gave them livelihood and a certain status.[29]

Lieutenant W.J. Muir returned from his expedition much disappointed. All the local inhabitants had run away from their homes and villages when he passed, and the Thakurs with him had taken advantage of their absence to carry out a plundering raid, setting fire to the villages and driving off all the cattle they could find. By an irony of history, Lieutenant W.J. Muir had simply restaged a typical pattern of behaviour on the part of Rajputs when entering territory that was not under their control.[30] This was not the best possible advertisement for the ruler. A few police posts and state granaries for collecting revenue were, however set up, which became the favoured targets of Motilal's followers during the 1922 revolt.

In fact, as R. Deliege has pointed out, the attitude of the British towards the Bhils and other groups in the area continuously oscillated between two extremes. On one hand they often felt sympathetic towards them, condemning severely whenever they could, the excesses committed against them by local Thakurs and government officials. On the other hand they could not help seeing them in the light of local stereotypes; then, as Tod had

[29] Reports on the political administration of the Rajputana Agency, N.A.I., F.A., Serohi Agency, 1867.

[30] See B.D. Chattopadhyaya 1976:63.

been the first to do, they would expatiate upon their savagery and dangerousness.[31] Their reports would gleefully describe how entire battalions of soldiers, or of the ascetic mercenaries (Gosains) who were equally well-known for their bellicosity, had been wiped out to the last man in these hills:

> Some fifteen years ago, there were no less than seven *thanas* of the Oodeypur troops cut off by them almost to a man, all in the same night. Two years later, a band of 600 *Gosains* (all armed soldiers seeking for service) were attacked in the *ghats* by Bheels and Meenas who killed upwards of a hundred of them.[32]

And in 1922, with Motilal's revolt, it was the second of these images that prevailed. The reports which describe the supposed encirclement of the railway town of Abu Station by armed Bhils and Girasias whose drums resounded throughout the surrounding hills, evoke images that today seem strangely familiar from the mythology of the American Wild West – Major H.R.N. Pritchard would not have disgraced himself at the side of John Wayne. At least, this is what emerges from the numerous reports and statements these incidents gave rise to.

After Motilal arrived in the area, the villagers of Bhakar refused to pay their revenue. Even worse, they were accused of having eaten up the produce of their harvests, so that the State agents could not even assess them: They are not only removing the crop but are also eating it to a large extent so that it will be impossible for the State to realize it from them later.[33] Moreover they were accused of having demanded payment of a tax from a local merchant, thus arrogating one of the primary prerogatives of the State. So the Chief Minister of Sirohi, accompanied by Major Pritchard and two hundred soldiers, was sent to Bhakar to seize the dues demanded by the government, by force if necessary. When they reached Siawa, the first village in the area, all the inhabitants had run away, and were watching what would happen from the surrounding hilltops. The Chief Minister and the British officer approached them with a few men, hoping to engage them in

[31] On the combination of British and local stereotypes used, among other things, to define the Bhils as a criminal caste, see S.N. Gordon, in A. Yang 1985.
[32] N.A.I., R.A., n. 68, 1841–7.
[33] Letter from C.M. Sirohi, N.A.I., F., Pol., f. 428, P, 1922–3.

conversation. But suddenly a young Girasia rushed towards Major Pritchard, aiming at him with his bow. The Major's revolver was not loaded. He turned his horse and retreated in order to load his weapon. At this moment some other Girasias approached him threateningly and the Major fled. At least, this was the Chief Minister's first version – his typescript has been corrected by hand by Pritchard, and the original sentence: 'By this time other Girasias got near him and threatened him and pushed him and so he ran away'[34] has been altered as follows: 'By this time *another* Girasia got near him and *persuaded* him so he ran away' – a version that was apparently more satisfactory to the Major's self-esteem.

Whatever happened, the Girasias were soon assembled so that negotiations could take place. It came out that the villagers' main grievances related to the exactions of the officials posted in the area. But it was not enough for the State to promise to punish them; for in any case the Girasias refused to pay dues at any higher rate than the one that had been fixed by Motilal. This would have meant breaking the oath that bound them to the movement, and they were not willing to do this at any price. As they explained, they would have to wait until the movement ended, which would not happen until the fifty-two kingdoms formed a joint assembly to respond to the complaints of all the tribal people living in their respective territories.

At this point, the Chief Minister found it expedient to suggest another solution to the villagers. The soldiers under his command would seize the grain corresponding to the revenue demanded, without committing any violence, if the villagers would guarantee on their side that this action would not be met with any resistance. In this way appearances would be preserved, and the people could not be accused of having broken their oath. According to the Chief Minister, the spokesmen agreed to this ploy. But no mention of this rather byzantine manoeuvre is made in Major Pritchard's report. He states simply that he warned the Girasias that he was going to take the grain by force and that he would not tolerate any resistance on their part.[35] But as soon as the soldiers approached a first house, the drums sounded and they

[34] Note of the Chief Minister, S.A.R., S.P., sr. 1, f. 372, 1922, Part II.
[35] Report of April 14, 1992 by Major H.R.N. Pritchard, N.A.I., F., Pol., f. 428, P, 1922–3.

found themselves surrounded. The Chief Minister explains that they decided to withdraw to avoid a blood-bath which would have cost the lives of many villagers. Pritchard gives a more complicated explanation. He says that although the information later turned out to be false, they were informed at this moment that the Girasias were preparing to attack a nearby munitions store, and he felt that it was more important to take his men there to stop them. The next day it was learned that after this departure, the Girasias had attacked the State store which sold alcohol in the area on the ruler's behalf. After these events, the State government decided to withdraw the officials who had been denounced by the Girasias; they were found guilty of the excesses they had been accused of. But it was also decided to give the Girasias 'an exemplary punishment', and the troops were called in again, in larger numbers and accompanied by an armoured vehicle. The British feared that the town of Abu Station would be surrounded. A final ultimatum was given to the villagers: if they did not resist the detachment that was sent to them, and fled into the hills, only a few of their houses would be burnt in reprisal; but if they tried to resist, not only would people be killed, but at least half the village would be set on fire.

This troop, led by three British officers, consisted of more than five hundred soldiers, plus the armoured vehicle. Disciplined detachments of Bhils, led by their English officers, were there alongside the Thakurs of Sirohi, mounted on their horses and accompanied by their own men, armed with bows and arrows. In the eyes of the Britishers, everything went off without a hitch. The actual engagement lasted only forty minutes. They congratulated themselves on the small number of Girasias killed, and the economical use of munitions by their own troops, attributing everything to the salutary effect of the cannon:

> There is no doubt whatsoever that had it not been for the moral effect of the 12 pounder gun, we would have found the ridge from which I expected resistance strongly held, and its capture would undoubtedly have cost us casualties and very heavy losses to the Girasias.[36]

About twenty houses were set on fire by the government troops. The Chief Minister closed his report on this incident by noting with satisfaction that after this armed intervention the assemblies

[36] Ibid.

of seven Girasia villages had spontaneously come to pay their taxes: 'It is hoped that now all the Bhils and Girasias of the neighbourhood will soon settle down peacefully'.[37] But this was not the case.

THE VALORIA AFFAIR

Contrary to a common idea about them, the tribal people, even those whose villages were very isolated in the hills, had regular contact with other communities who were more directly involved in caste society. This was true for example of Brahmin or merchant communities living on the margins of areas controlled by the tribals. Brahmins from the village of Vasa were more or less official *pujaris* for the Bhils of Valoria, a village in the Aravalli foothills. They rarely visited the tribal villages, but the Bhils would regularly come to them and give them a small portion of the produce they harvested. In exchange the Brahmins would perform rituals on their behalf. More importantly, these Brahmins would act as trade and financial agents for the Bhils and Girasias who borrowed money from them.

After Motilal passed this way, the Bhils and Girasias of these villages joined his movement, and like others refused to pay their revenue dues. So it is not surprising that the Brahmins and *banias* of Vasa village were the first to be asked by the state government to negotiate with the tribals and make them see reason. They went to Valoria, where they were received by the *panch* of Bhils and Girasias, and reminded them of what had happened a few decades before. The villagers of Valoria had been well known for brigandry, and the Raja of the time, Umaid Singh, had come in person to Valoria to bring them to order. But as he was leaving the village some arrows flew in his direction, and in reprisal he ordered the village to be burnt. Then the Brahmins of Vasa had intervened and negotiated a compromise between the Bhils and the Raj. Now they proposed to fulfil the same role: the Bhils should confide their grievances to the local Brahmins, and they would make sure that the government would settle things justly.

But the Bhils of Valoria refused to yield to the Brahmins' arguments. They did not contest their validity, but there was no

[37] Note of the Chief Minister, S.A.R., S.P., sr. 1, f. 372, 1922, Part II.

question of them breaking the oath of unity that bound them to Motilal's movement. They explained that 'their decision was as firm as the existence of the sun and the moon'.[38] One of the Bhils expressed it less poetically:

> We replied that our *Eki* was a religious and social binding which we cannot break up. In doing this, we would be deprived from marrying anybody; neither would anybody seek us in marriage for the matter of that.[39]

However, the Bhils suggested that the Chief Minister should come alone to them, so that they could tell him about their grievances. The Brahmins refused this, and suggested that instead a delegation of the Bhils could come to their village to meet him there; meanwhile they themselves would stay in Valoria as hostages, to guarantee the Bhils' safety. But this was not accepted either.

A little later the Brahmins returned with a written message from the Chief Minister. A meeting was organized to receive them, which was attended by several thousand men, including fifteen *panches* representing different tribal communities from the surrounding area. After much deliberation and many attempts at negotiation, the Bhils' resolution had not weakened, although, according to the Brahmins, they had been courteous towards them:

> Thereupon, Bhil Lakha and others said they were not willing in any way to break their Ekka, and thus to come to terms. They expressed their thanks to us the punches of village Vasa for what we had done for them and said that they could not follow our advice as their end was near and they were subjected to evil stars.[40]

In a last attempt at mediation, the day before the army was supposed to intervene, the Bhils were advised to send their families and herds into the hills, so as to 'spare the innocent'. The army moved in on 22 June 1922, and after a short clash in which several people died, the soldiers occupied the village of Valoria and burned the houses. Some Brahmins were then sent to the Bhils to propose the following alternatives: either to accept the principle of a compromise, or to migrate with their families and goods into

[38] See the report in the newspaper *Bharat*, 16 June 1922:2–3.
[39] 'The second Bhil tragedy in Sirohi', Report by the representatives of the Rajasthan Sewa Sangh, Ajmer, May 1922, statement of Poona, p. 5.
[40] Ibid.

another kingdom – the ruler left them the choice. This time the Bhils agreed to meet the Chief Minister, on condition that the Brahmin assembly would personally guarantee their safety. The meeting was organized. The Bhils were allowed to bring their weapons, while a small number of soldiers would accompany the Chief Minister, along with an adjutant of the British Resident (Major Pritchard). Approximately two hundred and fifty tribals and the same number of Brahmins were present at this assembly. After long palavers, it was agreed, it seems, that the Bhils could honourably break the oath that bound them to Motilal's movement so long as they did this in a formal way, again holding the swords on which they had sworn their oaths before. Then they symbolically shot some arrows in the air and Major Pritchard followed suit by letting off his revolver. The Bhils were assured that their grievances would be reported to the ruler and given consideration. The ceremony came to an end and they were given permission to rebuild their houses.

The two incidents described above are equally significant. In the second one, we see clearly for the first time the importance of the mediatory role played by Brahmins on behalf of tribal people. In other parts of the kingdom, it was more likely to be Charans who fulfilled this role. And it can be seen that one of the main complaints of the tribals was that now they had to relate to the State, no longer through these traditional intermediaries whom they knew and usually respected, but through State officials whom they did not like. In addition we can see in action some of the traditional rhetorical forms that might be used by one party or another. The relationship between the ruler and the tribal people was described, on both sides, in patermaternalist terms *(mabap):* the rebels were constantly compared with wayward children, whom the ruler should be able to pardon magnanimously.

It is equally interesting to note Brahmin morality at work. What shocked them most, it appears from their account of the events, was the challenge to the existing social order *(dharma)* shown in the ideology of this revolt:

> Bhils and Girasyas now openly said that there was no King over them, that they were the owners of their own land and that they would now go and live in the Sirohi Palace and conduct their raj. They also uttered

non-sensible [underlined in the original] words, that Brahmins, Banias and other castes would now be one and would make intermarriages.[41]

But this did not prevent them from feeling an interest in what was happening,[42] nor from understanding the symbolic logic of the tribals; this is shown for example by the various different procedures the Brahmins suggested to them for breaking the oath that bound them to Motilal without becoming perjurers.

The Thakurs behaved no less traditionally. We have already shown that at this time they were in open revolt against the ruler and his government for reasons that differed little from those of the tribals. But their reaction was dictated by another logic. Man Singh, Thakur of Jogapura, the ruler's most determined opponent, nevertheless sent him the following message:

I am very sorry to receive the notice . . . regarding Girasiyas . . . I shall be very much obliged if you will let me know to come forward to break their heads if they rebel against the State.[43]

When Motilal and his men first crossed into Sirohi territory and moved towards Mount Abu, they had been prevented from proceeding further because the Thakurs had barred their route; confronted by them, Motilal and his followers had to turn back. Similarly, in the military operations mounted by the British at Bhula and Valoria some Thakurs participated along with their own men, including the Thakur of Rohua, whom we have often mentioned as one of the most undisciplined nobles in the kingdom. The British were well aware of the risk of violence and escalation entailed by the presence of the Thakurs. And the fact that practically all the nobles rallied to the ruler in facing the tribal revolt should not obscure the fact that a small minority of them, who lived close to the hills where many of Motilal's supporters came from, were tempted to join him.

Similarly the attitude taken by the ruler and his Chief Minister, at least initially, was also based on a thoroughly traditional logic. In the face of a revolt of this kind, the alternatives were simple:

[41] *Bharat*, 16 June 1922:2–3.

[42] It seems that some Brahmins supported Motilal's claims: 'Khedar Brahmins affected by the present atmosphere, proclaimed in that village that in the future, no revenues were to be paid to the State. The two brahmins were arrested. . . .' Letter from Man Singh of Jogapura to H.H., C.O.L., 21.1.1922.

[43] Letter from Man Singh of Jogapura to C.M., C.O.L., 4.2.1922.

either the tribals agreed that they were subjects of the kingdom, and submitted at least symbolically to its authority, in which case, however nominal their statement of allegiance, the principle was reaffirmed; or else they explicitly defied royal authority, no longer merely opposing it with passive resistance as they had always done; in this case the implicit agreement underlying both their presence and their relative autonomy was broken, and there would have to be a trial of strength, even though the outcome was uncertain. Nothing symbolizes this state of affairs better than the destruction and burning of houses and villages. Since these were anyway quite mobile populations, this was a rather brutal way of signalling that they were no longer wanted in the kingdom.

As far as traditional reactions are concerned, the British on the spot were no different. Although they were careful to observe some minimum formalities, they were nevertheless adopting and utilizing traditional methods of suppression that had always been used against these tribal peoples. So they too were ready to order villages to be burnt. We may also mention the way in which Motilal's revolt provided a focus for their various fears: either they saw in it the spectre of bolshevism; or they perceived the Bhils and Girasias as incarnating the timeless archetype of the threatening 'savage'.

ANOTHER GAME

What was Motilal's revolt? Men and women had risen up against the exploitation they were subjected to, banding together in solidarity to confront all the authorities who wanted to suppress them, and refusing, as far as they could, to allow themselves to be divided or outwitted by any of the intermediaries and negotiators who approached them. They were practically unarmed, in the face of a well-organized military force. But they cleverly played the few trumps they held: the inaccessibility of their terrain, mobility, and numbers. Their leader was no political genius, and things obviously became too much for him to handle. But he was a very effective catalyst for the movement he had initiated and of which he became the symbol.

Motilal's movement was not just an ordinary tribal revolt led by a tribal leader and ultimately crushed by the colonial powers.

As we have seen, from the beginning Motilal had been inspired by the Bijolia movement, led by that outstanding nationalist militant, Vijay Singh Pathik, who directly intervened in Motilal's movement. Motilal had also been identified locally with Gandhi, an identification he endorsed. So events took a new turn when Gandhi, who was informed about what was going on in this remote part of Rajasthan by no other than the Chief Minister himself, entered the game, both with articles which he wrote about it, and through emissaries whom he sent to the spot to represent him. Nor was the Chief Minister of Sirohi just any ordinary royal official. He was Rama Kant Malaviya, son of one of the most famous nationalist militants of the time, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Journalists also entered the picture, who were also nationalists and whose denunciatory articles gave a new dimension to the events. And on the side of the British administration too, in addition to military men with predictable reactions, there were more politically experienced figures, such as R.E. Holland, then Agent for the Governor General in Rajputana.

Between these men there was a complicated relationship, marked as much by the antagonism of their respective positions as by an objective complicity in their evaluation of the situation – even though they drew radically different conclusions from it. V.S. Pathik, Pandit Rama Kant Malaviya and R.E. Holland knew each other quite well; they had already negotiated, only a little before, a temporary suspension of the Bijolia movement. Rama Kant Malaviya, whose father was a respected friend of the Raja of Udaipur, occupied a peculiarly ambiguous position, for he was very well acquainted with all the nationalist circles. This was one reason why he had been appointed as Chief Minister by the ruler of Sirohi, with the agreement of the British:

> I understand now that His Highness' idea (on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief) in engaging the Pandit was that he would thereby secure immunity from the attentions of the non-cooperators who had already gained a footing in Grassia villages. His expectation was not wholly realized since the Pandit was unable to quench the activities in the State of persons who had been, to some extent, his own friends and colleagues, and the condition of things in the State itself was too bad to be checked by any palliative measures.[44]

[44] Report of R.E. Holland, N.A.I., F., Pol., f. 428, P, 1922–3:74.

Assessing Motilal

The British highly disapproved of Motilal. This was to be expected. But it seems that it was a great shock to him to hear that Gandhi had passed an equally harsh judgement against him in an article dated 10 February 1922, entitled 'Danger of mass movements':

> I hear that a gentleman by name Motilal Pancholi hailing from Udaipur claims to be my disciple and to preach temperance and what not among the rustics of the Rajputana States. He is reported to be surrounded by an armed crowd of admirers and establishing his kingdom or some other -dom wherever he goes. He claims too, miraculous powers. He or his admirers are reported to have done some destructive work. I wish that people will once and for all understand that I have no disciples.[45]

The severity of this judgement was matched by that passed by V.S. Pathik shortly afterwards:

> One thing, however, is certain and that is that it was beyond Moti Lal's intellectual capacity to lead the public on the right path . . . nobody, even a child, would ever recognize Moti Lal as having a political aim or status, nor was he connected with any political society.[46]

Of course, we must see these comments in their context. The article referring to Motilal was published only a few days before Gandhi took the decision which may mark the most important turning-point in the history of modern India. There were many who thought at the time, and still think today, that if Gandhi had not solemnly called a halt to the Non-Cooperation Movement on 22 February 1922, after the Chauri-Chaura incidents, India could have gained her freedom immediately. There are many indications to confirm this, and there is no doubt that the destiny of India would have been completely different, if only because of the relatively better relations between Hindus and Muslims which prevailed at that time. However this may be, once the Movement had been summarily broken off in this way, a revolt like Motilal's took on a completely different significance by continuing. It was no longer only one of the unnumbered local variations of the much vaster movement that had fired the entire

[45] 'Danger of mass movements', *Young India*, 10.2.1922.
[46] Letter from B.S. Pathik to R.E. Holland of 26 March 1922, N.A.I., F., Pol., f. 428, P, 1922–3.

subcontinent. Instead it became a manifestation of what, in Gandhi's view, constituted a subversion of the Non-Cooperation Movement into forms he disapproved of because they betrayed the ideals of non-violence he stood for. He sent emissaries to Motilal to ask him to end the movement immediately, to prevent lawlessness and to see that the revenues were paid. One of these representatives was a man Gandhi trusted completely, Mani Lal Kothari, and he charged him with defusing the situation, if possible in cooperation with the authorities.

These emissaries met Motilal at the moment when he was moving towards Mount Abu with a large following. At the same time, V.S. Pathik also joined them. Together they all tried to persuade Motilal to stop his action, to prevent the Bhils 'being killed like dogs', as they are reported to have said on this occasion.

Gandhi's disavowal had shaken Motilal's resolution. But on the other hand, Mani Lal Kothari was favourably impressed by him, and on the strength of the statement he sent to Gandhi the latter soon revised his earlier opinion:

> The Bhils are a simple and a brave people. They have certain grievances. They have found in one Motilal Tejavat a friend and a helper. He has been, it is said, weaning them from drink, gambling and meat-eating and asking them to live an orderly industrious life. The only fault I can find is that he has been moving about with a large retinue of his followers.[47]

So it might seem that a solution was in sight. On Mani Lal Kothari's advice, Motilal agreed to leave the movement immediately and go to join Gandhi in his *ashram* in order to complete his Gandhian education. R.E. Holland, who was in contact with Mani Lal Kothari, was in favour of this solution which would make it possible to get rid of Motilal quietly. He felt that an announcement of his absence would be sufficient to restore the region to order. But at this point another factor entered the picture, one which had often harmed, at least from their own point of view, the effectiveness of the colonial administration in India. Holland was a pragmatic man, and a skilful politician; but he was appointed from Delhi, whereas settling Motilal in Ahmedabad was a matter for the government in Bombay, and they did not

[47] *The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Delhi Government Press, Pub. div., vol. 22:477.

agree to it. In fact almost since the beginning of the colonial presence in North India there had been a conflict of prerogatives between the authorities in Delhi and those of the Bombay Presidency, whose administrative authority gradually diminished with centralization of the Imperial administration, symbolized by transfer of the capital to Delhi in 1911.[48]

Moreover, by the time these negotiations were taking place, in March 1922, the British were getting over the fright they had felt at the dimensions attained by the Non-Cooperation Movement. They had arrested Gandhi on 11 March 1922, and they were determined to put a stop once and for all to the agitation in India. It proved impossible for Holland to get permission for Motilal to go to Ahmedabad; although he had been in favour of this solution, he was unable to get any guarantee granted for Motilal in case he voluntarily gave himself up to the Mewar authorities. And in the end he was formally ordered to have no more contact with Motilal, nor even any negotiation through the intermediary of Mani Lal Kothari;[49] for George Lloyd, the Governor of Bombay, saw this mediation as just another indication of Motilal's subversive capacities. The highest authorities of the Empire (the Viceroy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London) accepted his view rather than that of Holland and the Ministry of Political Affairs in Delhi. It was decided to adopt a policy of military intervention, with the double objective of arresting Motilal and putting down the revolt. This decision had predictable consequences. Motilal, who felt himself more and more under threat, and knew that they wanted to arrest him, saw no other course open to him than to allow himself to be carried ever further by the Movement that his presence impelled; and incidents of the kind we have just described went on increasing.

Accounts of Violence

How could a nationalist journalist gain such easy access to information about the happenings at Siawa? The person who had most trouble explaining this was Rama Kant Malaviya, the Chief Minister. For it soon came out that he had not only met the

[48] On the conflicts between the Bombay Presidency and the Central Government, see I. Coplan 1982, Chapter II.

[49] N.A.I., P., Pol., f. 428, P, 1922–3:36–42.

journalist, K. Kalantri, but had even given him a detailed account of what had happened. The journalist continued with his enquiries and collected several statements. Kalantri was a representative of the Rajputana Sewa Sangh and the Rajputana Madhya Bharat Sabha.[50] He published a long report on these events in the nationalist newspaper *Tarun Rajasthan*, under the title 'Assassination of Bhils in Rajasthan'. According to this report, after the British intervention, not only had more than a hundred houses been burnt in the village, but 'scores of cows and buffaloes were shot down' and 'a pregnant woman was burnt alive'. Major Pritchard was described as a coward, and the Chief Minister and other officials were said to have broken their promise to the Girasias.

Rama Kant Malaviya must have been all the more annoyed because he had surely agreed to give his own personal version of the events in order to justify his role to the nationalists and show that his intervention alongside the British was reluctant but unavoidable. The report gave rise to a whole series of counter enquiries and official denials. The true number of deaths and houses burnt, and even the most insignificant points, were discussed in detail. The report stated, for example, that at the moment when the cannon was fired, 'people who were cooking their food left it undone and those who were eating did the same'. To which the Chief Minister thought fit to retort, 'How anybody could be cooking his food and eating it at the break of dawn passes my comprehension'.[51]

The report was obviously exaggerated. Nevertheless it put the authorities on the defensive. Especially since after the incidents

[50] The Rajputana Sewa Sangh had been founded in Wardha in 1919 by Vijay Singh Pathik and the local Thakur, and then, after some harassments set in train by the British, moved to Ajmer; for paradoxically at this time the nationalist militants enjoyed greater liberty of speech and action in British India than in the princely states. The original objective of this movement was to alter the relations between Thakurs and their dependents. V.S. Pathik started several successive periodicals, connected with this organization and with the Rajputana Madhya Bharat Sabha: *Rajasthan Kesari* in 1919, then *Tarun Rajasthan* and *Navin Rajasthan* in 1922. The Rajputana Madhya Bharat Sabha, which was close to the Congress, was founded in Delhi in 1919 by V.S. Pathik; J.L. Bajaj; G.S. Vidyarthi and C.K. Sharda.

[51] Report of Chief Minister to R.E. Holland on 27 April 1922, S.A.R., S.P., sr. 1, f. 372, 1922, Part II.

at Bhula and Valoria another team of journalists also carried out an investigation and published another long report in Ajmer, entitled 'The second Bhil tragedy in Sirohi'. This pamphlet, printed in May 1922, was published in Rajasthani and English in several newspapers and was widely distributed (two thousand copies in English and many more in Rajasthani). Some copies were even sent to England. Here too mention was made of children being burnt alive, old women assaulted, and animals deliberately killed. The report, which claimed to be based on more than a hundred eye-witness accounts, gave some extracts from these. One Bhil stated, for example, that Major Pritchard had given the following warning: 'We have killed 50 of you and wounded 150 and if you are not straight still we would kill more'.[52] The way in which the Bhils broke their oath of loyalty was also described in terms very different from the version reported by the local Brahmins:

> Upon this, the European threatened to shoot us and demanded of us to swear before him on *Bhawani* (sword) that we would break our *Eki* and return to the village. We took up *Bhawani* out of fear but we did not agree to break up the *Eki*.[53]

The village headman of Bhula related the following dialogue, said to have taken place between him and the Chief Minister: 'The Diwan enquired of us, "On whose side are you, Gandhi's or the Government's?". Bhils: "On Gandhi's" '.[54] So yet again the report clearly challenged the attitude of the Chief Minister and the British, the unjustified use of brute force and their refusal to mediate with the help of nationalist militants such as V.S. Pathik who would easily have been able to pacify the situation and avoid bloodshed. Of course this new publication also led to the usual official denials, which appeared in pro-government newspapers. Rama Kant Malaviya, who was singled out for attack, also published his denials in the local press. These events led to his resignation, in circumstances which, as described by R.E. Holland, clearly reflect all the ambiguity of his position. They exemplify the conflict of loyalties which was experienced at this time by

[52] The second Bhil tragedy in Sirohi, Report by the representatives of the Rajasthan Sewa Sangh, Ajmer, May 1922:5.
[53] Ibid., statement of Poona.
[54] Ibid., statement of Bhula village headman.

many Indian officials who were in government service, yet close to the nationalist militants:

> The trouble eventually came to a head in the Grassia rising, and the Pandit, although lacking some important qualities as an administrator, displayed real loyalty to the Durbar and cooperated with vigour and decision in the necessary measures for suppressing the rising. To the best of my belief he severed relations with his former associates after the situation had plainly declared itself and incurred considerable odium from them in the performance of his duty. He told me that he would be prepared even to arrest his own father if he came into the State to stir up trouble. His Highness' suspicions were, however, aroused against the Pandit at an early stage of the rising because he permitted and even assisted some non-cooperators to visit the scene of our action against the Grassias, in order that they might correct exaggerated reports of casualties. Far from doing this however, they concocted further lies, and the ill success of the experiment, while definitely embittering the Pandit against his former friends, irretrievably damaged his position with the *Maharao*. Further the Pandit is by no means a courtier and His Highness gradually began to be fretted by his hectoring manner and his impatience of control.[55]

Conflicting Accounts

The preceding chapters have focussed on two different concepts of civil society. In local society, the use of violence – whether against oneself or against others – had been evaluated within the context of a more or less widely-shared value system which endowed such actions with both effect and significance. The intervention of the colonial powers, and the ideology on which it was based, had the effect of transforming the significance of these traditional forms of violence, which until then had enjoyed a certain degree of impunity. The criminalization of practices which society had formerly tolerated was intended to present them in a new light, as 'pure acts of violence', divorced from the context that had previously been considered as justification for their use.

[55] Report of R.E. Holland, N.A.I., F., Pol., f. 428, P, 1922–3:36–42, 74. A later exchange of letters between the two men however shows that Rama Kant Malaviya, though increasingly closely linked with the nationalist movement, nevertheless maintained a cordial relationship with Sarup Singh, at a time when the latter had become the main target of local militants; see C.O.L., F., Eminent People.

This development also had another side to it. While the violence inherent in traditional practices came to be viewed in a new light, the equally effective violence now exercised in the name of the law, authority and 'civilization', under Western influence, enjoyed a 'legitimacy' which masked its excesses. The earlier chapter on revolts by nobles emphasized the process by which one such practice lost its legitimacy, while the chapter on the bards also showed how colonial ideology led to a dissimulation of official violence.

Motilal's rebellion enables us to take a step further in our analysis of this phenomenon. Like nobles, Brahmins and bards, the tribal peoples had a specific relationship to violence which had been one of the most effective guarantees of their autonomy and their distinctive identity relative to the rest of the society. And for them, just as for other classes of local society, the main effect of the intrusion of colonial values was to undermine the legitimacy of practices that involved intimidation or even force.

However the influence of militants from the nationalist movement gave a new dimension to this rebellion. The practices characteristic of local society were denounced in terms borrowed from Western thinking not only by the British and those who ranged themselves on their side, but also by men who were in open opposition to them. The involvement of V.S. Pathik, and of Motilal initially, was based on an indictment of the various forms of oppression to which the nobles and State officials were subjecting the people. Moreover British repression was clearly denounced and combatted as such, and the veil of legitimacy covering it was violently impugned. And the violence committed by the tribals during their revolt was no less vigorously condemned and denounced by Gandhi and the militants close to him than by the British.

So this intervention by the nationalists, and especially by Gandhi himself, was completely at odds with the habitual rhetoric which justified colonial violence against traditional violence, and vice versa. In the eyes of someone like Motilal, the violence practiced within civil society justified revolt. And in the eyes of the British, revolt justified the use of force to repress it. But it became difficult to sustain these justifications in the face of widespread testimonies to the state of violence prevailing in traditional society, or revelations about the bloody details of colonial repression. Beyond the

confrontation between participants, whether Indian or British, who continued to act and think in predictable terms, new distinctions began to appear.

First we should note that the actual course of events was still determined by men who were following either the logic of revolt, or that of repression. The interventions of V.S. Pathik, Mani Lal Kothari or R.E. Holland did not in fact change the immediate course of history. Nevertheless these interventions did help, in retrospect, to give a new meaning to these events, and to define new elements. In this their actions were decisive.

One revealing indication of this is Motilal's continual uncertainty about his own role. Contemporary accounts of the revolt present him unequivocally as a leader who readily added a charismatic dimension to his image. In his own account of the events, however, he presents himself more as a militant whose essential motivation, largely borrowed from V.S. Pathik, was to denounce the existing order of civil society. But in the end he tended increasingly to present himself as a simple social worker inspired by Gandhism.

V.S. Pathik on the other hand criticized the forms of oppression inherent in the traditional social structure just as forcefully as he denounced British repression. He was critical of Motilal's revolt, not on fundamental grounds, or for reasons of violence, but because of its improvised and insufficiently political character.

Gandhi refused to sanction this revolt at all. First of all because, unlike Pathik or Motilal, he refused to view the traditional logic of Hindu society as essentially perverted. Secondly because he rejected in principle any collective action based on violence. The strength of his stand, refusing ever to justify any recourse to violence, was that it enabled him to condemn colonial repression all the more severely, revealing it in all its arbitrariness; this led him also to risk idealizing social relations within Indian society, or at least the possibility of transforming them non-violently.

CONCLUSION

Motilal's revolt is complicated to analyse because it involves several different scenarios at the same time: first there is one which evokes a relatively traditional concept of existing society; as we

have seen, many people were eager to play their respective parts in it: not only the tribal people themselves, but also the Thakurs, so ready to savagely repress their revolt, or the Brahmins, trying to fulfil their traditional role of intermediaries for the dominant authority and ideology amongst the tribal people. Similarly, the image of authority appealed to by all these parties was primarily the traditionally-sanctioned ideal image of the just ruler, who respects the commitments made by his forerunners.

Recent historians have tended to emphasize one specific dimension in popular revolts like that of Motilal: that of the ever-renewed struggle of subordinate classes to gain emancipation. Certainly this dimension is not absent from such historical episodes, as this movement itself exemplifies. But there is another dimension that is much less often stressed: such revolts also presented local elites with opportunities to demonstrate their own power, by force if necessary, and to reaffirm the values that legitimized their own status and position.

However, this period was characterized at the local level by a widespread questioning of the traditional role of such elites within the framework of the colonial order which was trying to impose itself. Motilal's movement is particularly interesting from this point of view because it shows clearly how a kind of vacuum was created in these circumstances. And this explains how the actions of a few nationalist militants took on such importance.

Mediation between tribals and the rest of society had previously taken place through traditional roles adopted, according to the case, by Brahmins, Charans, Thakurs, or occasionally by rulers of neighbouring states. And, as we have seen, these were the very communities whose roles were being most radically challenged by the colonial authorities. The collapse of traditional modes of mediation to be observed in a revolt like this one, was not really very different from the collapse which, at another level, was affecting the relationship between the ruler and his nobles, which had led the Thakurs, for example, to call in lawyers connected with the nationalist movement, or the ruler to look for help from a Britisher, Macpherson, in negotiating with his nobility. Another element to be taken into account under these circumstances was the inability of the local officials, although they had only recently been appointed for this specific purpose, to serve as effective links between the authorities and

the people within the new administrative set-up which was emerging. They were not merely rejected by the people, but themselves were a source of new conflicts.

With their varied skills, the nationalist militants were the people best able to fill the void that had arisen. It is remarkable how they were able to respond to the needs of all the most active sectors of the population; not only of peasants or tribals in revolt, but also of local elites and even the colonial authorities. In fact these few men were led to assume a crucial role – especially since, as we see from the events described here, they stood on both sides of the divide. The most striking example of this is the symmetry apparent in the roles of Rama Kant Malaviya and V.S. Pathik, each of them responsible for representing profoundly opposed interests, who not only knew each other very well, but also both claimed the support of Gandhi, with whom they were in communication.

In preceding chapters I have tried to show that these moments of tension within local society were more than mere clashes of interests. Rather, these were times when the positions of the various participants were being rearranged on the basis of a restatement, and sometimes a redefinition, of the essential values underlying the social bond. The fact that nationalist militants increasingly often took centre stage in this process is a decisive element in understanding the position and role these people were taking on at this time.

It is noteworthy, for example, that V.S. Pathik, Rama Kant Malaviya and Manilal Kothari incarnated between them the three predominant strains of the nationalist movement: its most socially radical trend, its most traditional one, and Gandhism. And for a time it looked as if the clash between tribals, local elite and colonial authorities had given way to a different contest, between divergent tendencies in the nationalist movement.

On the other hand we cannot help noting that the principal protagonists of these events – Motilal and his followers on one side and the local government and the British on the other – had both their images and their range of action radically limited and redefined by divisions which opened up in the context of this mediation, that lay beyond their control. The representatives of colonial authority (Holland and others), found themselves practically disowned and paralysed because the compromises they

wanted to achieve with the aid of the militants were rejected by their own hierarchy. And on the other hand, Motilal lost confidence in himself because he too was disowned, by V.S. Pathik and by Gandhi.

The final outcome, in the absence of any effective mediation was, as we have shown, a return to a direct and unequal confrontation between tribal populations left without support, and the armed might of colonial power. This explains the 'traditional' and largely anachronistic aspect of the final clash: villages being burnt, and 'pardon' being graciously granted by the ruler to subjects who had been 'misled' by 'agitators'; but not before a severe repressive action had taken place, in which each party had the chance to appear, one last time, in its traditional role.

So it seems as if in the course of Motilal's movement a complete cycle can be observed, with a return to the point of departure, after the demonstration of a threefold stalemate: first of the British and the local officials appointed to set up a new administrative system; then of traditional mediators trying to re-establish themselves; and lastly of the nationalist militants, who tried to supplant both of the former in resolving the crisis. This was exactly the lesson that Gandhi, and he alone, was to draw from these events.

6

Jains and Credit

The preceding chapters have illustrated how practices connected with concepts of violence and truth were gradually modified and revalued under colonial influence, and how ideas about the history of the region underwent a corresponding change of perspective. In the context of conflicts between the ruler and his nobles, bards and Brahmins, and tribal groups, we have looked at challenges to the legitimacy of the established privileges enjoyed by these different groups. But one of the most recurrent and dramatic themes in the history of modern India has not yet made its appearance, one relating to perceptions about religious identity, so deeply-rooted in Indian society.

It is hardly surprising that this dimension did not occupy the immediate foreground in Sirohi. There was only a small Muslim minority in the kingdom, and their presence does not seem to have presented any problems to the rest of the population. The tribal people, and the merchant castes practicing Jainism, had of course obvious differences on the religious level. But even so, these practices had a recognized place in the complex galaxy of Hinduism and its related creeds. The term 'animism', introduced by the colonial administration to describe the religious customs of the tribals, was quite meaningless, except in terms of a purely Western logic which used it to make them a target for missionary efforts.

Nevertheless, the kingdom of Sirohi was not to remain completely untouched by religious strife. This fact says much about the extent of this phenomenon which, as we know, was to leave a tragic mark upon the history of the decolonization of the subcontinent.[1] In Sirohi, perhaps for lack of other targets, it was

[1] Communalism within the sphere of colonial influence is attracting increasing interest from scholars today. See for example, G. Pandey 1992; and for Rajasthan in particular, S. Mayaram 1992.

first the Jains who were singled out, in a rather atypical movement; and then the ruler along with his Muslim officials became the objects of a political campaign which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

ANOP DAS

I have been unable to find out much about Anop Das, because even today the mention of his name arouses strong feelings of distrust in informants, and few documents relating to him have been preserved – in fact some may have been deliberately destroyed. He was Rajput by caste, from the village of Kalapura near Sheoganj. He served with the British Army in Mesopotamia before the First World War. It would be interesting to know what experiences he had there. It is said that he was influenced by bolshevik ideas, and deserted from the army. After returning to Sirohi he became a *sanyasi.* It is also said that he started agitation against local representatives of the bourgeoisie and imperialism, which meant, more concretely, members of the merchant castes, and colonial officials. Several books of his teachings were compiled and published, dealing with methods of achieving salvation for the soul *(Atma puran)* and the workings of society (*Jagat hitkarni* – 'For the benefit of the world'). Unfortunately I have been able to find only a few extracts from these pamphlets, written in several languages (Hindi, Urdu, English), and published in 1912.[2] The tone of the second text seems to be essentially religious in inspiration. But it also contained passages in which the author attacked merchant castes and the Jains, whom he considered responsible for all the ills suffered by the local people. They were not only denounced for their trading and moneylending activities, but also, following a very long-standing tradition, blamed for all the calamities afflicting the rest of the population, from famines to eclipses and epidemics.

However some of the most determined opponents of this movement have tended to exempt Anop Das from any direct responsibility for it, making a distinction between the man himself and the movement which bears his name, and even from writings attributed to him but prepared by other people, which may not

[2] Anop Das 1912.

always have been based directly on his own words. According to this view, Anop Das was a genuine religious figure whose statements would have been quite inoffensive had they not been distorted and misused by some of his disciples when they decided to disseminate his teachings. One thing seems to confirm this. In 1919 Anop Das sent a series of telegrams to the ruler, disavowing the movement that had arisen in his name: 'Thousand people gathered harassing villages in my name, pray disperse and save my reputation'.[3] Nor have I been able to find any definite evidence of his desertion, nor of his supposed bolshevism, although both were mentioned to me, and have been referred to in court proceedings initiated on several occasions against the movement which took him as its inspiration.[4]

So it is difficult to determine the role of Anop Das himself. But that of his disciples, the ideology of the movement which bore his name, and incidents involving it, are well known. It all began in 1920, approximately eight years after he retuned from the army. During these years he gained disciples from all castes, and disseminated his teachings, apparently without anyone finding anything objectionable in them or considering him as anything other than one of the many holy men who gain a hearing in India. But it seems that under the influence of some of his disciples he began to speak more radically against merchants in general, and against the Jain community in particular.

In May 1920 a delegation of his disciples, along with a band of about a thousand men, went to the capital to demand an audience with the ruler. They wanted all Jains to be expelled from Sirohi, they said, so that peace and prosperity could return to the kingdom. They accused Jain ascetics of practicing magic to harm people in the kingdom. It was a drought year; and this was a traditional accusation made against Jain ascetics at such times, which is even mentioned by Nainsi in the seventeenth century:[5] they were blamed for the failure of the monsoon.

For about ten days, Anop Das' disciples and their band roamed

[3] I.O.L., P.S., S.S.A., 1920–5, n. 266–P, 1920.

[4] I owe some of the documentation at my disposal on Anop Das and his movement to Pukhraj Singhi, who opposed it energetically, as lawyer, political militant, and one of the outstanding members of the Jain community in Sirohi.

[5] See R.K. Qanungo 1969:58.

the villages around Sirohi. Wherever they went they attacked traders and any Jain ascetics they encountered, threatening, robbing, and occasionally beating them. In one village, for example, they broke up the inauguration of a temple and forced the Jains present to show their acceptance of Anop Das' teachings by putting their signatures on a copy of one of his books. In another place they tried, unsuccessfully, to destroy a Jain temple, and in yet another burned some Jain sacred books.[6]

At this time the band of Anop Das' disciples seems to have considered mainly of men from artisan castes. There were also a few Rajputs among them.[7] At this period however their band only attacked Jains in villages under the authority of Thakurs who supported the movement. In villages where the Thakurs protected the Jains, Anop Das' followers could do nothing against them. For once, however the State government did not remain inactive. The leading disciples were arrested, tried, and condemned to terms of imprisonment; and Anop Das' writings were proscribed throughout the kingdom. But this did not stop the movement. Ten years later, it was deliberately used by the local government against the Jain community of the kingdom, which by that time had rallied solidly to the nationalist cause. The Anop Das movement continued to make appearances right up to very recently, usually in the times of tension and pressure leading up to local elections. Its relative success amongst certain sectors of the population, and its ideology, must be explained by an account of the special position occupied by Jains in the kingdom.

THE JAINS IN THE KINGDOM

One accusation regularly made against the Jains by Anop Das and his disciples took the form of questioning their origins. They were suspected, in particular, of coming from Sri Lanka. There is a paradox here. It is certain that, unlike the tribals, but like all the higher castes, many Jain lineages did maintain memories of earlier origins, before their settlement in the kingdom. Their ancestors were often from northern Rajasthan. But local tradition

[6] Report of A.D. Macpherson, June 1920, I.O.L., P.S., S.S.A., 1920–5, n. 10/900 of 1920.

[7] Pukhraj Singhi's archives: trial record (criminal case n. 339 of 1919–20) listing the names of seventy-five people accused of active involvement in the movement.

also referred to their presence in the area from very early times: certainly long before the arrival of the Deora Chauhan clan. The antiquity of their temples, indicated by many inscriptions, was irrefutable evidence of this.[8] Nevertheless, unlike other communities whose presence in the kingdom is attested to for a much shorter time, the Jain community's relationship with the rest of society was always marked by a greater or lesser degree of 'otherness'.[9]

The Jain community, which constitutes a very small proportion of the population of India, is more concentrated in Rajasthan than elsewhere. In Sirohi the proportion is much higher than the national average. In 1901 11.1 per cent of the population of the kingdom were Jains.[10] Some Brahmins and members of a few other castes also engaged in trade and moneylending. So did Muslims, especially those belonging to a small merchant community (Bohras) in Mandar, in the west of the kingdom. And members of other merchant castes, such as Vaishnava Agrawals, gradually moved into the kingdom from the turn of the century onwards. But on the whole, it was Jains who controlled the vast majority of commercial and financial activities. And up to the middle of the twentieth century the terms used for merchant castes in general (the common expression 'bania', and the more respectful title 'Mahajan') were almost synonyms for Jains.[11] They were important because they were much more than just commercial middlemen in the local economy. In fact, although for a long time they had no right to own land[12] and were not directly involved in agricultural production, they controlled the economy completely through the various roles and functions they fulfilled.

[8] See L.S. Ram 1920.

[9] I am grateful to Dhirubhai Sheth for discussing with me in Delhi this sense of exclusion, which is difficult to define but seems to be a feeling shared by Jains all over the subcontinent.

[10] D. Erskine 1910, *Gazetteer of Sirohi*, Ajmer, Scottish Mission Industries.

[11] As the studies collected in M. Carrithers and C. Humphreys 1991, show, the degree of identification and assimilation of merchant communities with their religious or sectarian beliefs (Hindu, Vaishnava, or Jain) varied greatly in different localities. For a detailed discussion of this topic see C.M. Cottam Ellis 1991.

[12] This is an important point, because at the beginning of this century the commercialization of land-rights enabled members of merchant castes to own land in most of British India.

And as a result they held practically all administrative posts in the kingdom's governmental apparatus.

At the highest level, a Jain usually held the office of Chief Minister *(diwan)*. The rulers had learned to avoid giving this post to Rajputs of their own clan, as they did in earlier times – these had too often been tempted to make use of this position to turn against the ruler.[13] Moreover the Jains, who along with Brahmins, Bhats and Charans constituted the educated class of the kingdom, were the only ones with any real expertise in accountancy. The Sirohi Jains, who were almost all Svetambars, belonged to three sub-groups (Bisa Osval, Dasa Osval and Porval). Traditionally the main government officers of the kingdom were appointed from among the Bisa Osval, almost all of whom lived in the capital.[14]

The Jains also worked as stewards *(kamdar)* on the Thakurs' domains. We must again point out that in practice the authority of these landlords was distributed into three hierarchized functions. Immediately next to the Thakur, who held the supreme authority in his *jagir* and a monopoly over the use of force – aided by the Rajputs and tribals who were his closest dependents – stood one or more Brahmins *(purohit)*, endowed with the authority and status conferred on them by their caste and their knowledge of *dharma;* and then there would be one or more Jains, who were in charge of the economic management of the estate. These were often the nobles' closest confidants, entrusted with representing their interests to the ruler, and in any kind of delicate circumstance.

This meant that the Jains expected, and usually received, protection from the nobles. In Sirohi, both in the capital and in all the villages where the Thakurs lived, one would almost always find, right next to the palace or the nobles' residences, the homes and temples of the Jain families connected with them.

At a lower level, there were a few Jain homes in practically every village in the kingdom, with the sole exception of the predominantly tribal areas. Each of these families had a more or less hereditary clientele drawn from all the other castes. The

[13] 'Make your brother a pradhan or chief minister and you may as well write off your Raj embodies Rajput political wisdom as we read in Nainsi's Khyat', R.K. Qanungo 1969:50.

[14] For a detailed sociological study of the Jains in the capital of Sirohi, as well as an analysis of their community and rituals, see N.K. Singhi 1987 and 1991.

relationship was a lender-borrower one, but in fact included many other aspects. The Jains would supply farmers with any kind of article they could not obtain from local craftsmen, and advance them whatever sums of money they needed, particularly for family ceremonies, or in times of hardship. They would then reimburse themselves directly from the produce harvested. They would market any surplus, as they did for all the classes who had a right to some share of the harvest. The *jajmani* system, which consists of sharing the harvest of a particular area between various claimants, from the ruler or local Thakur down to the lowest castes, was most often only a superficial appearance, masking a very different economic reality. Since most of the population were in debt to the Jains, this redistribution was normally only virtual, and purely for accounting purposes; for as a rule the Jains recuperated the greater part of the produce – so that they usually even had to supply the farmers with the seeds they needed for the next season, immediately putting them back into debt again.

So the prevalence of the *jajmani* system in the area should not lead us to conclude that the produce was in fact shared out between all the different claimants – because of the Jains. Nor did the distinction between taxation in kind *(bhog batai)* or cash always have the significance usually attributed to it. Again it was local merchants who were in charge of collecting the share of agricultural produce due to the State. They fulfilled this role in turn for periods of six months or a year, and were then responsible for immediately selling the grain obtained, and remitting the proceeds to the government. So the existence of a system of taxation in kind does not allow us to automatically assume that there was no monetarization of agricultural surpluses. The historians of the Aligarh school who have worked on the economic history of Rajasthan have demonstrated this for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[15]

There were however certain limits to the Jains' ability to appropriate local surpluses. First of all, there had to be some which required a labour-force to do agricultural work. But farm workers and the lower labouring castes in general were highly mobile. The local peasantry had few possessions and in times of hardship or social upheaval they were readily inclined to leave

[15] B.L. Bhandani 1991.

if conditions became too difficult. The Jains always faced to risk of finding that their borrowers had suddenly vanished. And as these borrowers had no land or valuables, the Jains felt justified in asking high rates of interest on the money they lent out. For this relationship to persist over any length of time, each party had to find some benefit in it. There must have been a fundamental reason why the farming and labouring castes allowed the Jains to grow rich at their expense – something they were fully aware of – and in spite of everything went or borrowing from them for generation after generation. A borrower expected from his money-lender a sort of permanent commitment to advance whatever sums he needed to fulfil all the social and familial functions entailed by his status, and to provide the grain necessary for survival in times of drought and poverty. As long as the Jains fulfilled these obligations, the lender–borrower relationship was rarely broken. This is probably the reason, as David Hardiman has shown for a neighbouring area of Gujarat, why there were few open revolts by local people against the moneylenders.[16] This makes the Anop Das movement all the more interesting, precisely because it was relatively atypical.

On the other hand, the farmers had neither the funds nor the motivation to make any investments to increase agricultural yields, since they possessed no rights or other guarantees that they would ever benefit from them. This problem arose particularly in connection with the costly construction of Persian wells, which would allow more regular irrigation of the fields. The installation of a well of this kind, where the water is drawn up by means of a series of interlocking wheels driven by one or more oxen, required a substantial investment. Farmers felt all the less inclined to provide this, since ownership of the well automatically reverted to the Thakur who held title to the lands they were farming, or to the ruler, if their fields formed part of the State domain. And as a rule, neither of these were any more concerned about productivity than the farmers. In Sirohi the Jains, who were on the contrary very aware of the advantage of increasing local yields, found a novel way of getting these wells installed. They agreed to finance the construction themselves, advancing the farmers all the necessary funds and materials. The farmers did not have to

[16] D. Hardiman 1987.

give anything in exchange. But the Jains asked the Thakurs, who would be the real beneficiaries in the end, to grant them, in return for their expenditure, part of their share of the produce harvested over an agreed number of years. At the beginning of this century, the State government had the for once relatively original idea of reviving and institutionalizing this ancient procedure, in order to extend the area of irrigated land in the kingdom.[17]

In the end the real difficulty for any Jain in Sirohi. I was repeatedly told, was not so much to make money, as to hold on to his wealth. For they enjoyed neither the status and respect due to Brahmins and associated castes, nor the opportunities for intimidation and recourse to violence of the Rajputs and tribals. And yet the Jain community did have real influence. They embodied practically the entire intellectual and economic elite of the kingdom. Jains occupied important government posts. A large proportion of the population depended on good relations with them to maintain their status, and at times even for survival. But there was a profound disparity between this many-sided influence and the legitimacy of their position.[18] As we have seen, the Jains originally had no right to own land. And on many Thakurs' domains the rights accorded to Jains were little better than those of the lowest castes, although their wealth would have allowed them higher aspirations. They had to remain content, for example, with ordinary houses: only a few of them were granted exceptional permission to add an additional storey or a gateway to their homes.

Certainly the nobles normally protected the Jains: first, because they, more than anyone, needed money and valuables to uphold their rank, and the Jains were the only ones who could provide them; and also because they relied on them to manage their estates. So they were ready to support the Jains against defaulting

[17] See *Sirohi State Report* for the year 1904–5, Ajmer, Job Printing Press.

[18] From this standpoint it is interesting to compare the situation of the Jains in Sirohi with the apparently very different one of Hindu merchants in Sind during the nineteenth century. There the landowning classes were Muslim, and – most significantly – British rule had led to a commercialization of land which enabled members of merchant castes to own it. But in spite of such great differences, the structural balance of the relationship between these merchant castes and the rest of the population seems to have remained on a very similar basis for a long time; see D. Cheesman 1982.

borrowers, or anyone who might threaten them or try to seize their belongings. They did this in their office of local magistrates, and required considerable returns for it. With the tribal people, things were little different. The Jains feared them, for they knew that they were easy prey, frequently robbed or held to ransom. Yet they often employed tribals to protect them on journeys, or when they went to collect debts.

The relationship between Jains and Thakurs, Rajputs and tribal communities was always marked by a profound ambivalence. Each side was heartily despised by the other: the Jains for greed, wealth, and their non-violent ideals which far from being respected by the rest of the population were normally considered a sign of cowardice; the others were no less severely condemned, for violence, a liking for alcohol and meat, undeveloped intelligence and spendthrift ways. But at the same time, the nobles kept up a real complicity with the Jains, who were their closest advisers; and the Jains in return, as the British discovered, readily supported nobles in rebellion, even helping them to dispose of goods obtained by holding other merchants to ransom.

The problem of analysing the influence of merchant castes in Rajasthan will be considered here in slightly different terms from those normally used by historians, who have, for example, highlighted the tax-farming contracts *(ijara)* granted for varying periods on income from the domains of nobles or rulers.[19] Looking at what was happening in Sirohi at the beginning of the nineteenth century we find little trace of this system. Of course this does not mean that it may not have existed earlier. In fact we do have one indication of it: the main creditor of the Raja in 1855 was a firm in Udaipur which was again granted the income from several villages within the State domain. But, as we have noted, more fundamental was the all-pervading presence of the Jain community, as State officials, tax-collectors, stewards or moneylenders, at every level where the local economy was managed and administered; just as there is every indication of large-scale indebtedness of the whole population to them, from simple farmers and craftsmen up to nobles and rulers. This leads us to question whether the extent of the merchants' influence in Rajasthan can be measured solely in

[19] S.P. Gupta 1986, Chapter X.

terms of official contracts. For it was not necessarily, or even mainly, on this basis that the merchant community as a whole gained their claim to a large share of local surpluses. Unlike the ruler or the Thakurs, their 'right' to this income had no basis in the prevailing ideology. It was simply the outcome of many separate agreements – more often individual than collective – between *banias* and the rest of society.[20]

Historians have often debated why powerful Thakurs would cede their rights to merchants as repayment of debts. Another way of looking at the same question is to ask how and why the merchants were able to perform their functions and accumulate so much credit, even though the rest of society accorded them no formal privileges, status or legitimacy.

Principles of Complementarity

Complementarity between merchant castes and the rest of society poses no theoretical problem in Hinduism – at least according to the overall social ideology of castes, in which the status of merchant castes (included in the third *varna:* the Vaishyas) is clearly defined. But if we enquire about the actual functioning of the society and the principles determining its cohesion and internal dynamics, the question takes on a new dimension, which becomes particularly evident in this particular case.

One first point should be emphasized. The presence of Jains in a village or province had much more than a purely commercial significance. It really altered the rhythms of social life profoundly. We have seen that the functions they performed helped to stabilize social and economic life, by guaranteeing to their clients and borrowers *(asami)* a minimum of the resources required to provide for their material needs and most essential social expenses.

[20] To gain an approximate idea of the volume such contractual relations might reach, we may refer to one of the few detailed research studies on this topic; this is the fascinating work of J. Howard M. Jones on the contemporary commercial and financial activities of a small Jain community in a village in the Dungarpur district of Rajasthan. The findings are striking: despite the poverty of the surrounding population, which is predominantly Bhil, in 1983 the twenty-odd Jain traders and moneylenders in the village held assets worth almost a million rupees: purely financial loans had been granted by these few Jains to no less than 4550 borrowers; J. Howard M. Jones 1991.

On the other hand, when political or climatic conditions deteriorated, the merchant castes, the only people with any wealth left, became a target for everyone. This process was swift and cumulative. Then the Jains, who were not only in danger but at the same time less and less able to recover the loans they had given, would try to reduce their economic commitments – which only made the situation worse. Both production and trade would be even further restricted, and yet more people would begin to abandon agriculture, leaving the villages or adopting alternative ways of living, and making the countryside increasingly unsafe.

So the presence of the merchant castes did not only have the effect of allowing them to appropriate for themselves part of the available produce. Their activities affected regional economic cycles much more profoundly, by altering the status of other economic agents, from ordinary farmers and craftsmen to powerful landlords. In order to obtain the articles they needed to maintain their status – or simply to survive – all these people, once in debt to merchants, assisted in spreading an economic regime which was no longer based purely on a retrospective distribution of actual income, but also involved all the elements of a credit system. Most importantly, this meant that the rhythm of consumption no longer automatically had to coincide with the rhythm of production. Thanks to the credit made available to them by the Jain community, farmers as well as nobles and rulers were enabled to consume (in ceremonies, or any other situation) goods whose availability no longer depended directly on local production capacities, but more importantly on the Jains' assessment of their borrowers' ability to repay later on. So by the very fact of the presence of this merchant community, both the cycles and the type of local consumption were profoundly altered. From the moment, for example, that a marriage involved expenses that obliged borrowing from merchants, because not doing so would lead to a serious loss of status, the merchant community had won the game, and their presence became indispensable to the rest of the people around them.

More fundamentally, this meant that the local economy of a small kingdom like Sirohi could be very largely based on a monetary type of economy, regardless of the amount of cash actually in circulation. The real degree of monetarization of an economy depends primarily upon the prevalence of a credit

system in the society. And for such a system to prevail, there is no need for a community that specializes in banking or pawnbroking, and even less, of course, for the presence of Jains. All that is needed is for some people to take on the roles of borrowers and lenders. Nevertheless, as a situation in Rajasthan (and in Sirohi in particular) shows, the widespread prevalence of an economic system based on credit is greatly facilitated by the presence of a merchant community, particularly if this community professes the Jain religion.[21] And I would like to try to account for this.

After a pioneering article by Renou, Charles Malamoud was the first to stress the importance of the concept of debt in ancient Hinduism.[22] Indebtedness is a fundamental condition that no human being can avoid: indebtedness to the gods, ancestors, the dead, is a burden carried by every individual, that can only be paid off by his own death. The importance of this concept of debt, applicable far beyond the purely economic sphere, has been generally confirmed by later ethnographic studies. Jean-Claude Galey, for example, has shown that social relations in a traditional Himalayan kingdom could be conceived in terms of a hierarchical pyramid of indebtedness contracted between individuals from the bottom to the top of the social scale.[23] This perspective is particularly helpful in understanding the workings of Indian society, because it emphasizes a dimension of the social bond that gets somewhat obscured when scholars stress too exclusively the more obvious ideological aspects of the caste system.

In fact, the traditional ideology of Hinduism transmitted by Brahmins sees confusion of castes as the worst of all evils, and a clear sign of something amiss in the social organism. On the other hand, the positions of lender and borrower did not carry the

[21] To formulate this more clearly, we could take almost word for word the conclusion of the study by Howard M. Jones (1991:138) quoted above, simply substituting the name Sirohi for that of Chandrapur: 'The important point about moneylending in Chandrapur is not that "everyone does it", but that no community "does it" quite like the Jains'. In fact the Jains exemplify some of the most characteristic features of merchant castes. But that does not, of course, mean that these are exclusive to them. The ethos of Vaishnava merchants is very close to that of the Jains, throughout western India.

[22] C. Malamoud 1988.

[23] J.C. Galey 1980.

pejorative connotations often associated with them in other cultures. In practice, this meant that it was not degrading for an individual to get into debt, so long as he could carry out the expenses entailed by his status. Nor was it in any way dishonourable for a Brahmin to lend money for interest.

One of the distinctive aspects of Jainism was to modify this perspective slightly: on one hand the emphasis was removed from the ideology of caste. Theoretically at least, Jains do not acknowledge the existence of caste. But at the same time, the concepts associated with debt took on a visibility and centrality that they had not, or no longer, had in Brahminism. the positions of borrower and lender were no longer so closely bound up with a socio-cosmic order defining the status of every individual, as they had been by caste ideology. The individual is now seen as more directly responsible for avoiding the debts, whether material or religious, that life occasions. It is up to each individual to gain for himself and his dependents the position of a lender rather than a borrower. The result is that, unlike in Hinduism, the lender's position is highly valued, and loss of credit, which is both material and social, is considered by Jains in practice as a mark of both material and spiritual failure. All Jain social and religious practices explicitly aim at establishing a credit account in their favour, and the merit they may acquire is carefully valued, enabling them to compensate for all the faults that the very fact of living makes unavoidable. And it is of course tempting to see this as one reason for a great degree of compatibility between Jain beliefs and the professions practised by merchant castes.

This change of perspective took on concrete form in a society which, even though most people did not share these ideas, could benefit from it. It mattered little to a farmer, Thakur or ruler that he was permanently in debt, so long as this enabled him to maintain or improve his status. They all more or less willingly accepted the fact that the Jains were getting rich at their expense, so long as they did not try to use this wealth for any ostentatious display, or attempt to gain social or political power. And the Jains accepted this, because for them accumulating credit was valued more than using it – except for religious purposes, the only area where the concepts of credit and spending could be legitimately reconciled. The relationship of the Jains to the rest of society, it seems to me, was fundamentally based upon this complementarity.

THE PROTECTION MARKET

Another rather elusive aspect of the matter should also be stressed. As we have seen, the Jains could only prosper under the protection of local representatives of warrior castes. They needed protection both for themselves and for their property. And a relatively peaceful atmosphere had to prevail, for them to be able to expect their loans to be repaid from the agricultural activities of their borrowers.

One of the consequences, and perhaps the most important one, of this interaction between merchant and martial communities was the development of what could be called a 'market' in protection. And one of the structural preconditions for the functioning of this market was the fact that most of the merchant castes of western India were strictly non-violent, which made them particularly vulnerable to threats of aggression. Contrary to what we might suppose, this situation was not entirely disadvantageous to them. For one thing, it spread them the considerable expense that would have been involved, at least during the nineteenth century, in protecting themselves. But on the other hand it meant that they had to pay all the taxes demanded by various parties in return for assuring the safety of themselves and their belongings. As a counterpart, the nobles had to be in a position to maintain their authority within their respective areas of influence. Historians of nineteenth century in India have shown that in order to cover the constantly increasing expenses of all sorts (military, administrative, for display, etc.) required by their rank, the nobles too, throughout the second half of the century, became more and more dependent upon credit from the merchants, and were their best customers.[24] So nobles and merchants were bound together by complex forms of interdependency, to which the fortunes of both parties became ever more closely linked.

LIMITS TO COMPLICITY

But this complementarity had its limits. Nobles had an effective method for dealing with Jains who tried to recover amounts advanced – which they rarely did – or else, as happened more often, proved reluctant to provide all the advances demanded.

[24] G.S.L. Devra 1991.

The Thakurs could simply threaten to expel them from the *jagir*, or to confiscate all their property.[25] Then the only recourse of the Jains was the same as for all castes who could neither use force nor claim any special status: flight. When this was an isolated gesture, it was of course a admission of weakness. But if flight, or the threat of it, took on a collective dimension, things became very different.

This is a form of behaviour whose importance has been appreciated by historians only recently.[26] In an economy where, unlike the situation today, the rarest resource was not land, but men to work it, the real equivalent of rebellion by nobles, or the threat of suicide by Brahmins and bards, was for other castes the decision of an entire community to emigrate: a kind of inverse ostracism that affected *jagirdars* very seriously. And here too there was a set of traditions for ritualizing the action, giving it significance and effectivity.

The decision to go into voluntary exile had an impact only when taken by an entire community, or even several, thus depriving a local society, a noble's *jagir* or occasionally even a whole kingdom, of the labour and specialized services they performed. The decision would only be effective if taken by the caste councils, which alone had enough authority for their decisions to be binding upon the whole community. Moreover, in all the traditions studied so far, a gesture of this kind was significant not so much in itself, but as one step in a gradual exertion of increasing pressure.

The first step was the collective decision to use this means of pressure *(ucchala)*. A date was chosen on which all members of the community would leave their homes, often at night, and take refuge in inaccessible spots in the surrounding countryside. It was then up to the Thakurs to take the initiative, opening negotiations with the *panch* to agree on conditions for the community's return *(manamana)*. If these negotiations failed, or the oppression persisted, the *panch* would take a more radical step: a solemn oath *(gadetra)* was engraved on stone, prohibiting not only those in the fleeing group but all other members of the same caste or community from ever coming to live in the locality or drinking water from its springs. Of course the local authorities would hasten

[25] An early reference to tensions between merchant castes and ruling landowners can be found in S.P. Gupta 1986:140–3.

[26] In particular, see the work of D. Kolff 1990 and S. Gordon 1994.

to remove these stones, and the measure was effective only as long as it remained in the collective memory. These customs were commonly practised right up to the 1940s. In Sirohi one can still see villages that were deserted after one of these *ucchalas*, where the Jain quarter with its temple and houses was abandoned after an oath of this kind.

Between Two Social Orders

Going into voluntary exile was a practice that might be used by any caste. But the Jains' case was a special one, for at least two reasons: on one hand because of the opportunities open to them in such circumstances; and on the other because of the importance of their position in the kingdom.

The Jains might be relatively isolated at the local level, scattered as they were in practically every village in the kingdom; but they were perhaps less isolated than any other community over a wider range, extending from the region as a whole to the entire sub-continent.[27] For they were linked with two extremely ramified networks, which partially coincided in north-west India: first, that of the merchant castes in general; and secondly that of their co-religionists.

Their link with the network of merchant castes in itself provided them with two decisive advantages in case of local difficulties: the possibility of securing at least a part of their wealth by entrusting it to merchants based outside the kingdom, who could invest it profitably, so that in case of voluntary or forced exile they did not have to start again from scratch, since they already had the capital and contacts to make a fresh beginning. This link with the outside was even stronger in the case of the Jains. Trading contacts, the regular visits of *sadhus*, and the frequent pilgrimages they undertook, enabled them to widen and maintain links throughout the region. And everywhere they would find temples and *gurdwaras* where they could take refuge for a time in case of need.

The Jain community of Sirohi also had a real alternative base in Gujarat. Most of them originated from north-eastern Rajasthan, but the difficult social and political conditions of

[27] See T.A. Timberg 1978; also C. Bayly 1983.

life there, and perhaps even more, the commercial and economic prosperity of Gujarat, led many of them to settle in that province at every period, in successive waves. Sirohi was situated immediately to the west of a particularly significant frontier in the specialized geography of the merchant castes. To the north and east of the kingdom, they had their eyes turned towards the Indo-Gangetic plain. They settled gradually in towns like Agra and Delhi, and then, as British rule grew more established, went further eastward towards Calcutta and Assam. But the Sirohi Jains were looking exclusively south-west. They moved gradually, according to political and economic circumstances, towards the towns of Gujarat and Bombay. Even today there are practically no Sirohi Jains in Delhi, Agra or further east; but moving on from Gujarat and Bombay over the last thirty years they have established themselves in the South, even as far away as Madras, where some families who have done well recently, now act as magnets for young people left behind in Sirohi. For Jains who settled outside the kingdom kept up family and business connections with their communities of origin. They constituted an effective network that made the idea of exile conceivable, and sometimes desirable, when life in the kingdom became too difficult.

THE JAINS AND THE COLONIZERS

Connivance at First

As we have seen, the arrival of the British in the region coincided with a period when life in the locality had fallen to its lowest ebb, for lack of the civil peace required for the regulation and growth of the economy. The population of the kingdom had diminished considerably, most of the villages were deserted, banditry was rife and agriculture practically non-existent. A consequence and aggravating cause of this situation was that most of the Jain community had taken refuge in Gujarat or neighbouring kingdoms. The English were not unaware of the important role of merchant castes in re-establishing prosperity in the region, especially since their presence greatly helped to increase the revenues of local governments. The thing James Tod was most proud of in Udaipur and Sirohi was of having convinced merchant families to resettle

in localities they had left. In 1855 the Political Resident counted more than two thousand heads of households belonging to merchant castes who had gone into exile in surrounding areas over the preceding thirty years.[28] To encourage them to return, the British pressed local rulers to grant them many concessions and privileges throughout the nineteenth century. But the most convincing incentive was the guarantee of a certain degree of law and order, thanks to the British. Sheoganj, for example, today the most important town and commercial centre in the district, was founded only in the middle of the last century, right next to the military cantonment of Erimpura, where detachments of the Jodhpur Legion and the Bhil Corps were stationed under British command. This settlement was a planned township. In 1856, the Resident congratulated himself that several hundred houses had been built by Mahajans, on a rectangular grid of streets lined with young trees.[29] But the same Resident complained about how slowly the merchant castes were returning to the kingdom. According to him, the reason for this was systematic opposition from the rulers of neighbouring states, who forcibly tried to prevent the merchants from leaving the areas where they had taken refuge. Even in 1867 the new Resident W.J. Muir, still thought it worth recording the fact that

> The bunya class no longer feared to dress well, or to expend on themselves and their homes the fruit of their industry in Guzzerat and Bombay; and the merchant and the traveller again frequented the route through Sirohi, so long altogether avoided.[30]

So throughout the nineteenth century, members of local merchant castes were probably the greatest beneficiaries of the new colonial order, along with the ruler and the circles most closely connected with him. The roads were safer than they had ever been, and for the first time their personal safety and that of their belongings were no longer totally at the mercy of the greed of the local nobility. Those who conducted their affairs in Gujarat and Bombay benefitted from new economic opportunities. The establishment of the military garrison at Erimpura in the south of the

[28] N.A.I., R.S.A., n. 39:1855.
[29] N.A.I., F., Pol. Cons., n. 61/7, 1857; Cons., n. 226:1856.
[30] N.A.I., F., Report on the political administration of the Rajputana States, Sirohi Agency, 1867.

kingdom, the development of the hill station of Abu in the north, and the opening of the Delhi-Ahmedabad railway, which passed right through the kingdom, all encouraged the development of new small towns (Sheoganj, Abu Town), and stimulated trade. Paradoxically the capital, Sirohi, benefitted much less from these developments, although its administrative importance increased (this is still true today). For the town is not on the railway line, because local notables refused to allow it to pass close by for fear of its effect on the peace of life in the town.[31]

Both their activities as merchants and their characteristic ideology made it easier for the Jains than for any other group in the kingdom to align their interests with those of the colonizers. The two main objectives of the British in the region – to ensure a minimum of law and order, and to foster economic development – could not fail to benefit the Jains. And since they had no land interests to defend, it is not surprising that they alone amongst local elites did not mobilize against the State and colonial administrations when they started reforming land-taxation at the turn of the century, arousing the resistance and revolts from other castes which we have already described.

All this explains why in 1919, when the Anop Das Movement began to attack Jains all over the kingdom, the State rallied quickly to their defence, for once quite effectively – especially because the supposedly 'bolshevik' tone of the movement was particularly distasteful to the British.[32] This also makes it easier to understand some of the sociological features of the movement. As we have seen, apart from a few Thakurs, the followers of Anop Das at this time came mostly from artisan castes and communities at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. These communities were less dependent upon the Jains than farmers. Moreover craftsmen, especially from around Sheoganj, a town which had grown greatly since the opening of the railway, now found some of their products in direct competition with articles being sold in the bazaar, and this, it has been suggested to me, might explain their animosity

[31] Information from K.N. Singhi.

[32] 'The report of Pandit Mansaram Sukla clearly shows that they have imbibed bolshevic tenets, in that they said that all men were equal before God and why should the banya alone have riches and they could not make both ends meet, why should there be tehsildars, nabibs, Patwaris, thanedars, etc.' A.D. Macpherson to First Ass. to A.G.G., I.O.L., S.S.A., 1920–5, 28.6.1920, L/PS/10/900.

towards the Jain traders. As for the Thakurs, their attitude in the early days of the movement reflected the ambiguity of their behaviour towards merchants: some protected 'their own' Jains, while others turned a blind eye, or even supported the aggressors.

THE MERCHANTS MARGINALIZED

The connivance between colonial authorities and merchant castes which arose in the nineteenth century and led to great neutrality on the part of local Jains during the 1920s, gradually began to deteriorate to such an extent that Jains came to form the spearhead of resistance to State and colonial rule. There were several reasons for this: the first was a gradual process of marginalization of local merchant elites from the State administration; then came a series of legal reforms which challenged the role of Jains in the economy. To these internal reasons was added another factor: more and more Jains were starting to conduct their business affairs in Bombay or Gujarat; there they not only came into contact with new ideas and the spread of the nationalist movement; more importantly, they became increasingly aware of the 'backwardness' of the Indian princely states in comparison with British India.

One of the two primary objectives of the Political Residents who dealt with local rulers, alongside maintaining law and order, was to improve public finances. Approval both from their superiors and the rulers depended on their success in influencing local administrations to reduce deficits and increase revenue. These objectives were in general compatible with the interests of the merchant classes; but in actual practice things were more complicated. For although most merchants had suffered, a few had benefitted from the earlier state of anarchy in the kingdom. Although they suffered from the greed of the powerful, they had taken advantage of their lack of interest in accountancy. The rulers of Sirohi got deep into debt with some merchant firms, which went on receiving considerable sums as interest without the administration making any attempt to repay the capital. Moreover land revenue was collected in each village by local merchants, who took the responsibility in turn. From the lack of enthusiasm with which they performed this duty, it does not seem as if they gained much from it. But at least they were not interfered with

by outside officials. In a more general way, these were the people who filled all state administrative positions, practically free from any outside intervention, since even the post of Chief Minister was usually occupied by one of their own community. So there was a kind of organic identity between the local merchant community and the administration of the kingdom.

One of the main concerns of the Political Residents responsible for reforming the kingdom's finances, who were shocked to discover the opacity of administration, was gradually to break the hold of the merchant community over it. Pressing the rulers to hand over their executive functions, on the excuse that they were unable to handle them, the British took advantage of some periods of regency to take over the administration in its entirety. This happened twice in Sirohi, from 1855 to 1865, and from 1869 to 1875. Major Anderson took advantage of one of these periods to carry out a first reorganization of public finances. He settled the State's debts to various merchants and bankers, mostly Jains, but also a few Brahmins.[33] These debts were of two kinds: some of them were very low-yielding loans from merchants living in the kingdom. These were forced loans, indicative of the local merchants' inability to resist the ruler's dictates. These local creditors had few illusions about their chances of recovering their loans, and were delighted to be repaid. But most of the State's debts were of a different kind: they had been contracted with a firm of bankers in Udaipur, which had provided large advances over the previous thirty years, at exorbitant rates of interest, which they recovered in kind out of the revenue of some villages belonging to the State domain. The Resident simply cancelled this debt, arguing that the capital had already been repaid several times over, by virtue of the very high rate of interest charged.

In addition, the responsibility for collecting land revenue was gradually taken out of the hands of local merchants and entrusted instead to State employees, many of whom were recruited from outside the kingdom. Similarly the office of Chief Minister was no longer allowed to remain the monopoly of a few influential Jain families in the capital. More and more often the men appointed to this post were civil servants from outside the kingdom who were familiar with the British and their ways of administration,

[33] N.A.I., F., Pol., Pros. 30 April 1855, n. 13/125.

as well as with the new official language in use. This process was accentuated during the reign of Sarup Singh, who was accused of preferring to appoint British or Muslim officials who were strangers to the kingdom. He tended, for example, to employ retired British officials as his Chief Ministers.

So we can observe the gradual emergence of a new concept of the local economy and of State finances. And the logic at work is not fundamentally different from the one which, over the same period, was affecting practices involving concepts of violence and truth. So far, economic practices had taken shape within the context of the power structures that determined the relations between different castes, where latent antagonisms got counter-balanced by forms of mutual interdependency. The primary effect of the colonial presence was to give a new form to the economic and financial aspects of these relationships, giving them a new visibility and rationale in exactly the same way that concepts about truth and violence had taken on a new meaning when they began to be considered in isolation, 'as such'. And this 'as such' was nothing other than the effect of a new ideology, which in turn could come into existence only through the use of new practices and procedures that made this kind of view possible.

Jains could not be duped by this process any more than any one else. They soon realized that the marginalization of their role in local government constituted a challenge to their position and status in the kingdom. This sidelining remained their principal grievance against the administration right up to Independence, and explains more than anything else why they gradually became active against the State and its representatives. But this was not their only complaint. The merchant community did not hold any title to land in the kingdom, and was therefore little affected by reforms in this domain. It was more directly affected by a general reorganization of legislation and the judicial system, begun in the nineteenth century and given a new push by the government at the beginning of the 1920s. In 1924 a penal code and a code for criminal proceedings were introduced in Sirohi, and at the same time several different acts of legislation were promulgated (The Sirohi Limitation Act, The Sirohi Court Fees Act and The Sirohi Stamp Act). It was also declared that in cases where no specific laws of the kingdom were applicable, the civil law of British India would also prevail in Sirohi.

These decrees aroused determined opposition from the Jain community. This seems paradoxical. Since the time of the British arrival, the execution of justice had been shared between the assemblies of leaders of each caste (the *panchayat*) on one hand, and on the other the nobles and the ruler, to whom this was a very profitable privilege. So we might expect that the gradual establishment of a judicial system that was even partially free from arbitrary manipulation by the nobles, or the control of local dominant castes and communities, would be very welcome to the merchants, especially to those who were isolated and therefore subject to all sorts of local pressures. This is partly confirmed, by the fact that Banias were the main clients of the courts, and that soon many of them became lawyers and legal practitioners. But this was also the very reason why they were so hostile to the proposed reforms. Their two main criticisms against the reforms are significant. First, they protested against the increased rates of legal stamp duties, which directly affected them as the main users of legal contracts. They also complained about the language used in the new codes which, they said, utilized too many Urdu or Persian terms, thus disqualifying many of them who could express themselves only in the local Marwari dialect. The Banias proceeded to utilize the forms of pressure at their disposal, boycotting the courts and suspending all financial transactions with farmers. At this period, the main concern of the State authorities, who had only just and with great difficulty gained control of the various protest movements aroused by their reforms to the land-tax system, was to maintain the financial balance of the State. Anxious about the financial and economic consequences of this movement, which might prove disastrous to the State budget, they preferred to give way, and simply withdrew the proposed legislation.

So there is a striking difference between the way in which the State government (and the British) reacted to this protest from the merchant castes, and their attitude towards other sections of the population in the kingdom. Even before the Jains had proceeded to action, at a simple threat to exert financial pressure, the administration rapidly conceded their demands. Unlike other castes, the merchant community had not needed to modify the traditional forms of pressure they had always used. These had not lost their effectiveness in the new context; on the contrary,

they had gained effectivity, because purely economic considerations were gaining an increasingly decisive importance in British assessments of the efficiency of rulers and administrators.

But things went very differently twelve years later, when the State government made a fresh attempt to carry out its judicial reforms. For this time the merchant community's reaction was orchestrated by the Sirohi Praja Mandal, an association connected with the nationalist movement, founded in Bombay in 1934 by a small group of Sirohi citizens, almost all of whom were Jains, Bhats or Brahmins. On this occasion the government did not hesitate to use against the Jains the communally-inspired resentments expressed by the Anop Das movement, which they had resisted earlier. it must also be stated that the Praja Mandal on their side had no hesitation in exploiting very similar sentiments in their campaign against the ruler of Sirohi, claiming that this Hindu ruler was showing shameful affinities with Islam.

Before proceeding to examine how the merchant community in general became increasingly involved with the nationalist movement during the 1930s, it will be helpful first to take a look at the significant figure of Sarup Singh, who ruled Sirohi from 1921 to 1946.

7

Sarup Singh, the Impossible Synthesis

The colonizers considered the first two rulers to occupy the throne of Sirohi after their arrival in the area, as weak men, unable to deal with the unfamiliar situation history had placed them in. The first of these was Sheo Singh, who with support from the British, succeeded his brother who had been deposed by the Sirohi nobles. Shortly after his accession he quarrelled with the Political Resident and for a time refused to rule, leaving his capital and retiring to Mount Abu. This was only a shortlived episode, but on the whole his reign does not seem to have been a great success, and was certainly not considered as such by the colonial administration, which finally compelled him to abdicate. What particularly dissatisfied them was his double failure to keep the nobility in order and to restore the kingdom finances. After a decade during which the State was ruled directly by the British (1855–65), the throne was entrusted to his son, Umaid Singh, who was already quite old. He experienced the same difficulties as his father. In addition he had to put down a revolt by his younger sons, who expressed dissatisfaction with their lot by taking to the neighbouring hills. Umaid Singh was very pious and his court was dominated by Brahmins, Gosains and other religious figures. During the interregnum the British had almost succeeded in getting Sirohi out of debt, and they were critical of Umaid Singh's prodigal religious donations, which almost bankrupted the kingdom again. He too was forced to abdicate, and the British again took the management of the State into their own hands from 1869 to 1875, when his eldest son, Keshri Singh, was enthroned.

In Keshri Singh the colonial administration at last found a ruler to their liking. Their confidential reports show that in spite of his youth he was not prepared to allow either priests or nobility to

get the better of him. The Sirohi nobles never forgave Keshri Singh for his severity to the Thakur of Rewara, who after years in revolt was condemned to death and executed. The British felt happy that the throne of Sirohi was at last in firm hands. Keshri Singh had another virtue in their eyes, which inclined them to overlook any other shortcomings: he was determined to increase the State revenues, and to undertake all reforms necessary to achieve this. The general situation favoured his efforts: the kingdom was gradually coming out of its isolation, as it got linked to the rest of India by the railway; and throughout this period prices for agricultural produce increased considerably. Keshri Singh's greatest claim to glory, as he never failed to point out to the British, was having increased the revenues of the State ninefold between the beginning and the end of his reign. Nevertheless the colonizers gradually became aware that the very qualities they had appreciated in the ruler at first were obstructing the smooth running of the kingdom. His autocratic ways, coupled with his greed, finally united all the elite groups of the kingdom against him, so that it became practically impossible to continue to implement the process of reform. The colonial authorities were having a similar experience during the same period with the ruler of the neighbouring kingdom of Mewar.[1] So both these Rajas were induced, more or less unwillingly, to hand over authority to their respective sons. The British hoped that the 'modern' education given to the prospective rulers of the region under their own supervision would produce the sort of 'enlightened' statesmen they wanted on to see in power.

As Keshri Singh grew older, he had in fact been eager for his son Sarup Singh to become more directly involved in the government of the kingdom. In 1911 the prince was officially nominated Chief Minister, and from this time on he had practically taken charge of the government, to the apparent satisfaction of his father, who was full of praise for him. Keshri Singh even acknowledged later in a letter that at first he had welcomed the idea of abdicating in favour of his son. But he soon changed his mind. In an earlier chapter I quoted a letter in which he disavowed the actions of his son from the beginning of his reign. His main complaint against him was for agreeing to make use

[1] For a very partial but well-informed account, see C. Chenevix Trench 1987.

of Colonel Macpherson's services in his efforts to resolve the conflict with the nobles.

Two incidents which took place during the last four years of Keshri Singh's life, after he had abdicated, are worth reporting, not because of any inherent importance, but because they shed light on the later behaviour of his son.

In 1922 it was discovered after a burglary in his house that a fakir from Sirohi, then living in Ajmer, had there a sum of money and valuables worth more than four lakh rupees (Rs 450,000). This was a considerable sum, more than half the annual budget of Sirohi state. The British officers in charge of the investigations were convinced at first that this must have been stolen. But they finally had to accept the evidence: the fakir was able to prove that in fact the former ruler of Sirohi had, of his own free will, partly given and partly entrusted this treasure to him; in fact, it came out that he had given him even more than this. Keshri Singh's explanation was that after his abdication he had decided to devote his personal fortune to religious donations and he had taken these sums away with him for this purpose; but after reaching Ajmer he had been obliged to return to Sirohi temporarily for health reasons; so he had entrusted his fortune to the fakir to take care of until he returned.

This incident angered Keshri Singh's son, Sarup Singh. He was determined to retrieve the money, and appealed for British help.

> His Highness expressed the opinion that any man in sound enjoyment and control of his proper senses could not give away so much of his money to an ordinary adventurer like the fakir. His Highness considers that the fakir has got the ex-Maharao completely under his thumb, and that it is time that steps were taken to remove the fakir from Sirohi and to place some control over the Maharao. This is all the more necessary as the things discovered in the house include some of the old silver utensils which have been in the possession of the ruling family for four generations and also a silver image of Ganesh. H.H. states that this idol is generally worshipped at the time of Diwali and that no Hindu would lightly part with it, especially to a Muhammadan.[2]

But it is clear that whatever influence the fakir may have had, it

[2] I.O.L., P.S., Sirohi State affairs, 1920–5, P, 1677, 1922.

did not affect the Hindu piety of the former ruler. In his old age he adopted a way of life that was in full conformity with Hindu precepts. At various times of his life he had already performed many pilgrimages to all the holy places of Hinduism. And he decided to devote his final years preparing for death in the two holiest spots consecrated to this last stage of life, Hardwar and Benares. He was obsessed with one concern: if he should die in Benares he wanted to be cremated there: his remains should not be returned to Sirohi, as was customary, for solemn funerary rites to be performed there. He knew that his wish was contrary to Sirohi tradition and would be unpopular. So he was eager to get an assurance from the British that they would make sure that his son agreed to it, despite his reluctance:

> If you be not prepared to respect my wishes on account of biased opposition from the State, it would be useless to stay in holy places. For the last five years, I have left off all the worldly worries and cares and am leading a purely secluded life and no false notion of prestige or dignity should weigh against my last wishes.[3]

These episodes in the religious life of the former ruler would be details I would probably have paid no attention to, were it not that they strangely anticipate the destiny of his son, Sarup Singh.

THE THREE LIVES OF SARUP SINGH

The reign of any Hindu ruler is marked by rituals that celebrate the main stages of his life and reign, demonstrating and strengthening the dignity and legitimacy of his position: marriage, enthronement, birth of a son or adoption of an heir, funeral, etc. Poor Sarup Singh seems to have made a speciality of spoiling every one of these formal stages of his reign.

His first marriage was shadowed by tragedy, for his betrothed, eldest daughter of one of the leading rulers of Gujarat, the Raja of Bhuj, died just a few days before the marriage ceremonies. Rather than call off the wedding at the last moment, it was decided that he should marry her younger sister instead.

Although he had three other wives, Sarup Singh had only daughters, no legitimate son. He had one son, whose mother was only a concubine. He tried persistently but without success to get

[3] Letter from Keshri Singh, C.O.L., 21.11.1924.

this boy recognized as his heir. Only much later did he resign himself to adopting a successor – who soon lost both kingdom and title, the first to the newborn Indian Union, the second to another claimant, eldest son of the ruler's bitterest rival.

Nor was Sarup Singh's enthronement a great success. The ceremony was marred by a serious breach of etiquette: it was not the Thakur of Padiv, leading representative of the Sirohi nobility, who performed the ritual of handing the ruler his sword. This incident was strongly deplored by all the nobles, who for a long time used it as a pretext for refusing to acknowledge the new ruler, until they were compelled to do so by the British. As for Sarup Singh's funeral, it gave rise to an imbroglio we shall return to later.

Like most Indian rulers of his generation, Sarup Singh was a confirmed anglophile. One of his tutors had been Colonel Pritchard. He went to Mayo College in Ajmer, an institution modelled on the British public schools and reserved for the aristocratic youth of Rajputana. Sarup Singh never felt at ease in Sirohi, in the role of a Hindu ruler. He preferred his frequent long stays in Bombay, where he owned a home. And like many of his contemporaries, he had a passion for Western luxuries. The archives of the Collector's office in Sirohi, now kept in his former palace, are revealing. Among them are the remains of an abundant correspondence which the ruler kept up with all sorts of suppliers who provided him with the most diverse products. For his cigarettes he needs an exclusive tobacco imported directly from Virginia; he is anxious to get his fountain-pen repaired in Europe; he orders suits from Harrods, or silk stockings for his sweethearts from Bon Marché in Paris. In Sirohi Sarup Singh tried to grow 'exotic' European vegetables in an experimental garden, for his personal use. And like other rulers he enhanced the small capital of his kingdom with buildings and institutions in very Westernized taste: public parks, a zoo, a Country Club with tennis courts, a new rest house with a billiard room. These places, like the new schools, hospitals and prisons, were meant as evidence of the special status of the kingdom's capital. But Sarup's Singh's greatest passion of this kind seems to have been for his cars. He bought a very large number of these, considering the resources at his disposal. They can still be seen in Sirohi, some gradually rusting away but

others still in use by his successors. He even bought a garage in Bombay, an investment he was severely criticized for later, especially since he put a lot of money into an enterprise that rapidly went bankrupt.

Sarup Singh's overt anglophilia did not really matter much; far more serious was his increasingly apparent sympathy for the Muslim religion. In fact throughout the second half of his reign there was a widespread feeling in the kingdom that the ruler favoured Muslims, and it was even rumoured that he had been secretly converted to Islam.

In the mid 1930s these rumours, which had already been circulating for several years, took more public form with the appearance in the nationalist press of numerous articles denouncing the religious preferences of the ruler. And despite all sorts of official denials, this rumour persisted right up to his death in 1946, considerably damaging his reputation in the kingdom. I shall return to this press campaign. Here let us note only that it coincided with the formation of the Sirohi Praja Mandal.

Considering the different influences which shaped his identity, there is something almost structural in the way that Sarup Singh's life was organized, year in and year out. His time was divided between three places of residence: Sirohi, Bombay and Delhi. His wives and daughters lived in Sirohi, and willingly or unwillingly he had to fulfil his role of Hindu ruler there. He felt particularly ill at ease there because he found it impossible to avoid the influence of the factions that governed the little court. Whether these were old dignitaries from his father's time, or the more numerous ones who had gathered around his senior wife, he knew he could expect only hostility and contempt from them. He preferred his contacts with the British, facilitated by the nearness of the summer resort of Abu, where the Agent for the Governor General for Rajputana would spend the hot season with his administration, bringing in their train a whole entourage. The hostility against him in Sirohi, as well as considerations of pure competence, may explain why the ruler chose to appoint British or Muslim civil servants, or people from other parts of India, to the most important governmental posts.

But he preferred to live in Bombay. There he had the company of the concubine, Lilibhai, who had borne him a son and lived in his home. This woman's story reveals something of the fate of

families employed by rulers. Born in the kingdom of Dhrangadra, she had left home in the retinue of a sister of the local ruler when this lady married the ruler of Ratlam. This was current practice, for the women who accompanied a princess to her wedding were officially considered part of her dowry. Then she had to move again, this time accompanying a daughter of the Maharani who was given in marriage to the ruler of Sirohi. Sarup Singh had not acceded to the throne when he took Lilibhai as his mistress. She bore him a son, whose existence was long concealed for fear of his father's reaction. Only after his accession to the throne did he officially appoint her as his concubine. She then remained in purdah and was given the title of Paswanji. The Maharani of Ratlam took advantage of one of the ruler's absences to marry Lilibhai to a man from her own native kingdom, and tried to force her to go and live with him there. But when he heard what was afoot, Sarup Singh intervened. He had her practically kidnapped, and installed her and his son in Bombay, where they lived in his villa.

To get this son recognized as his official heir, at least two conditions would have had to be fulfilled. First the mother should have been of suitably respectable and recognized Rajput origin so that there could be no talk of a misalliance; and then she would need the status, not of a mere concubine, but of a junior wife to Sarup Singh. There was no possibility of this, in the context of a small court where everyone knew everything about everyone. Nevertheless, Sarup Singh decided to try and falsify this lady's past, with the help of one of his confidants, Lallubhai Desai, a former minister of the kingdom. This man went to Lilibhai's native village in Kathiawar and bribed a local Thakur to sign a written declaration that she was in fact a Chavda Rajput. Then he went to a neighbouring village and managed to get the bard who maintained the records of her family to falsify the documents in his possession to show Rajput origin for the entire family. Lastly, in a third village, he obtained a document from a Gaud Brahmin stating that the lady and the ruler had been married, in secret, but according to the Hindu rites sanctifying secondary marriages. Since Lilibhai's parents were dead, Sarup Singh asked her aunt to countersign these various documents. This aunt had already tried to obtain a large sum of money from the ruler, and again put a price on her agreement. Because he failed to satisfy her

demands Lilibhai's family finally revealed all these manoeuvres before a magistrate.[4]

From the 1930s onwards, Sarup Singh began to spend time not only in Bombay but more and more in Delhi, where he had bought a new property. There he lived with another courtesan. This one was a low-caste Hindu (from a musician caste, the Dholis) who had converted to Islam. And there he came increasingly under the influence of his private secretary, who was also Muslim. Despite the repeated requests of his ministers, Sarup Singh now usually refused to leave Delhi and seemed to want to avoid contact with his subjects as far as possible. His secretary became almost his only intermediary with the Government of the kingdom. Things went so far that the Chief Minister of the time, I.K. Pandya, threatened to resign unless he could have direct access to the ruler, and particularly that he should be available when he was needed for taking decisions. Sarup Singh's private secretary was a lawyer from Lucknow who had been in his service since 1927. In the letter of introduction he prepared at that time, this man had written:

> If I am fortunate enough to get the applied-for job, I assure your Highness that I will be able to win the confidence of my master in a very short time.[5]

And facts amply confirmed this prediction. So in Delhi a small coterie formed, composed mainly of this secretary and Sarup Singh's new mistress, which controlled him more and more completely. This at least was the view of the Sirohi elite, who were all the more concerned since both of these people were Muslims. Even the British, irritated at the ruler's failings and indiscretions which made him too obvious a target for nationalist attacks, were moved to take action. They too began to press him to designate an adoptive heir – a step which would enable them to start making concrete plans for his abdication.

A Vindictive and Ambitious Uncle

Man Singh was the younger son of a brother of Umaid Singh, Sarup Singh's grandfather. He and his line were in a rather

[4] Affidavit, C.O.L., May 1941.

[5] Abdul Juffaar Khan, letter of introduction, C.O.L., m.s.d.

unusual position. By adoption they had been made sole legitimate heirs to what had been for centuries the ancestral domain of the Bijawat clan. The Bijawats had always represented a potential threat to the rulers of Sirohi. In the reign of Akbar the founder of the line, Bija, a Deora Rajput, had formed an alliance with the Mogul emperor and was even decreed sole legitimate ruler of the kingdom for a time. In the 1880s Sardul Singh, Thakur of Rewara, the last great Bijawat noble, was for many years in revolt against the Sirohi ruler, devastating the region at the head of a band of Bhil and Mina tribals. He was condemned to death by the British, and shot on the road leading to the temple of Sarneshwarji, the tutelary deity of the dynasty. The nobles of Sirohi, as we have already noted, never forgave Keshri Singh, Sarup Singh's father, for allowing this outrage to be committed, particularly since the Thakur was closely related to most of them.

In 1931, after first his father and then his elder brother had died, Man Singh was able, following numerous petitions and a long litigation, to gain possession of Manadar, the main fief of the Bijawats. It is one of the curiosities of history that Man Singh then rapidly became the most relentless opponent first of Keshri Singh and then of his son Sarup Singh. It seems almost as if along with their domain Man Singh inherited the Bijawats' propensity to revolt against the legitimate ruler, even though he was a close relative. In fact that was precisely the problem. After a series of deaths without issue in the senior branch of the Deoras, Man Singh discovered that he or his sons might have a claim to succeed the ruler. But several conditions would have to be fulfilled. First, the king should not belatedly produce a legitimate heir; secondly, he should not succeed in his attempts to legitimize the son of his union with a servant; moreover he should not, before his death, legally adopt any other successor, which local tradition had always allowed. But in addition Man Singh would have to be acknowledged as the heir apparent. And here there was a hitch: normally if a Rajput was adopted into another lineage, he automatically forfeited any rights entailed by his birth. This meant that even if Man Singh was found to be the closest surviving relative of the king, that did not necessarily imply that he could succeed him, since in theory he had lost all rights connected with his royal descent from the moment that his grandfather had accepted the position of adopted heir of the Bijawat clan. But in reality the

situation was not so clear-cut, for it seemed to have been specified at the time of this adoption that it would not prevent its beneficiary from continuing to enjoy privileges normally reserved exclusively for immediate members of the ruling line. Would this exception apply even to a possible right of succession on the part of any of his descendants? That might seem rather far-fetched, but it did not prevent Man Singh from relentlessly supporting this interpretation. And he needed all his obstinacy to think that in spite of so many obstacles it was worthwhile fomenting all sorts of intrigues to further the possible accession to the throne of Sirohi one day, if not of himself, at least of one of his sons.

The way in which Man Singh, and then his son after him, pursued this objective, even years after Indian independence, has something fascinating about it. The methods they resorted to often recall the best traditions of court behaviour and palace intrigue that had always been practiced in Rajasthani kingdoms. For example, he arranged for one of his servants to plant a phial of poison in the kitchens of the school where his own children were studying. Then he sent an anonymous letter to the principal, suggesting that the kitchens should be searched. When the poison was discovered, he accused the ruler of attempting to poison his children. But alongside such almost comical efforts, he was always ready to make use of other more significant means. For decades he constantly bombarded every level of the colonial hierarchy with petitions, from the local Political Resident right up to the King of England. Moreover, he managed to use all the new communication media for his purpose. At various times he sent dozens of anonymous telegrams vilifying the ruler to every newspaper in the subcontinent. And last but not least, he contacted the nationalist militants to aid his cause, supplying them unhesitatingly with any information they could make use of to denigrate the ruler, in the hope that in the end he would be forced to abdicate.

The Struggle for Succession

Sarup Singh's entire reign was marked by incessant factional quarrels within his court. This is not surprising, especially in the light of his own equivocal behaviour. Even the beginning of his reign was complicated by the existence of at least three factions: supporters of his father, the former ruler, whose relationship with

his son became increasingly venomous; the leading nobles, who were equally opposed to both father and son; and the new ruler himself, whom the British supported even though their relationship with this man whom they did not much respect soon became extremely difficult.

As Sarup Singh's life became more complicated, new factions emerged, focussing on increasingly bitter rivalry over the question of who was to succeed him. In the end there were at least four opposed parties.

Lakhpat Ram Singh, the Raja's illegitimate son, never lost hope of inheriting his father's throne. For years he was actively encouraged by the ruler and by the powerful Finance Minister of Sirohi. In the 1940s however, finally convinced by the British that his son had no real claim, Sarup Singh disowned him. Nevertheless, he remained a claimant even after Independence.

The second party consisted of Sarup Singh's new Muslim mistress and his private secretary, Zafarul Hassan. This man used all his influence to discredit other claimants, probably in the hope that this woman would also one day bear the ruler a son, whose mentor he would become.

The third party centred on Man Singh and his son. These claimants had the considerable advantage of support from the Maharani, Sarup Singh's senior wife. They were also backed by the Maharaja of Jamnagar, one of whose sons had married a daughter of Sarup Singh; he was one of the most modern and active rulers in India in the years leading up to Independence, President of the Chamber of Princes and a personal friend of Vallabhai Patel. The main obstacle facing Man Singh, apart from his total estrangement from the ruler, was the legal complexity of his position as heir presumptive.

Yet another faction grew up around I.K. Pandya, a Brahmin from Rajkot in Gujarat. He had succeeded two British officials as Sarup Singh's last Chief Minister, on the recommendation of both the British and of Gandhi, who had been discreetly consulted. For in the closing years of Sarup Singh's reign, the British too became concerned about the succession question and started pressing the ruler to nominate yet another claimant as his adoptive heir. This was Tej Singh, a young cousin of his who would be the legitimate successor if Man Singh's claims were set aside. He was the official choice of the British, and of Chief Minister Pandya,

who hoped to be in charge of the kingdom until the new prince reached majority.

PRESS CAMPAIGN

In 1933, many mysterious articles about the ruler's private life started appearing in the nationalist press. In an Urdu periodical from Delhi one could read:

> The domestic affairs of the ruler will shortly reveal strange and mysterious facts. . . . The slightest change of circumstances is expected to unfurl the whole mystery, bringing to light interesting and exciting stories. It is said that the ruler of the State has bought a house at Delhi where he lived last year. It is also stated that those persons who are at present living in that house will help in lifting the screen. I have also been informed that when the private history of this ruler will become known, the country will be able to see some other Indian ruling Princes in their true colours.[6]

Or again, in the *National Call*, also from Delhi:

> The situation in the small Rajputana State of Sirohi is becoming increasingly complicated. His Highness the maharao of Sirohi and his affairs are soon likely to attract considerable public attention in the very near future, since unconfirmed reports of certain sensational developments, which need not be mentioned for the present, have already perturbed the subjects of the State. My information is that the situation is also being carefully watched in official circles.[7]

The Sirohi police soon found out that Man Singh was behind this campaign. The ruler was not the only one to be angry with him about it – so were the British, to whom his worst offense was having tried to cut through their internal hierarchy by addressing petitions on several occasions to the Viceroy and the King of England. They did nothing to interfere when this uncle of the ruler was condemned by a Sirohi judge to a short term of imprisonment. Out of respect for his rank he was not detained in the ordinary gaol, but in a building in the precincts of the temple of Sarneshwar, the tutelary deity of the royal dynasty. This did nothing to mollify Man Singh. He managed to get messages

[6] *Nahdat*, 6 Dec. 1933, Delhi.
[7] *The National Call*, 31 Dec. 1933, Delhi.

to the outside, and in 1936 this campaign against the ruler, still fed with more or less accurate information supplied by him, was taken up again in earnest by the nationalist press.

The accusation that Sarup Singh had converted to Islam was made more and more explicitly. Even worse in the eyes of his detractors, he was accused of attempting to convert his subjects. There was little evidence of this. Several newspapers referred to an allegation by Man Singh that his guards had tried to convert him forcibly during his imprisonment:

> There, I had to prepare my meals with my own hands. I had no practice for preparing meals. The result was, one day I burnt the finger of my right hand. There was a guard of Muslim Police over me there. They used every sort of pressure over me so that I may convert myself to Islam.[8]

These not very credible accusations were however strengthened by the already-mentioned resentment of the higher castes in Sirohi. Nationalist circles in the kingdom now regularly accused the ruler of preferring to appoint Muslims to government posts:

> There has been a stir on account of the fact that the literate Hindu youths do not obtain any appointments in the state while the outside Mahommadans are being admitted in numbers.[9]

Similarly the most extreme behaviour and statements were now being attributed to the ruler:

> I have got full rights in Sirohi. I can do whatever I choose. If you people do not like my administration, you may better leave the State. I will bring the Pathans to stay here. It is useless for you to have any correspondence with the Viceroy or the Hindu Sabha because they cannot interfere in my state in any way. You are crying about this ordinary law that I have made, but now I will make worse laws than this.[10]

Seeing the extent of this campaign, the authorities responded with all sorts of denials. An article appeared in which the Maharani denied that there was any friction between the ruler and herself.[11] Lallubhai made a statement under oath before a judge, recording his intimate contact with the royal family and the ruler over more

[8] *Rajasthan*, 25 May 1936, Ajmer.
[9] *Rajasthan*, 21 April 1936, Ajmer.
[10] *Akhand Bharat*, 15 May 1936.
[11] *Bombay Samachar*, 30 June 1936.

than forty years, and confirming Sarup Singh's adherence to the religion of his forefathers. He also stated that the ruler's mistress was indeed of Rajput origin.[12] Other articles appeared, denouncing the ongoing press campaign. A Delhi daily, under the heading 'Nefarious propaganda against Sirohi State', wrote 'Nowadays certain undesirable and rubbishy articles are being published in some Hindi papers against the Sirohi darbar'.[13]

But this did not put a stop to the campaign, although some nationalist editorial writers involved in it felt that they ought to modify the explicitly communal tone of their attacks on the ruler. For example the editor of *Rajasthan* found it necessary to clarify:

From my first article and this article, nobody should understand that I have a sectarian spirit or that I am jealous of more benefices going to a particular community. I am a well-wisher of all communities as much as I am of my community. Not only that but in my view, the whole human race is one community.[14]

Or, as another editorialist put it:

It matters little whether the Maharaja has embraced Islam or is Hindu. In our view Raja Saheb or Nawab Saheb is one and the same thing but Maharaja Man Singh is not the only person who has made allegations against the Sirohi ruler in this respect.[15]

This press campaign *ad hominem* was conducted with the aid of Sirohi nationalists belonging to the Praja Mandal. But this did not mean that it was approved by the nationalist leaders. Vallabhai Patel, for one, was completely against it. We know his view from a report of a Sirohi Praja Mandal meeting to which he was invited, and it is worth quoting:

It is not beneficial to unearth the affairs of the State rulers but on the contrary, we lose our prestige thereby. . . . Before seeing the faults of the kings, we should try to put an end to our cowardice, one cannot go to Heaven without dying himself . . . I say leave off defaming kings. Those who do not care for prestige have not to lose any prestige. . . . If you want to spoil his prestige, you can do so in two lines and not by filling four columns.[16]

[12] Declaration by Lallubhai Desai before the Sirohi Court, C.O.L., 21.11.1936.
[13] *Ikdam*, 3 Feb. 1936, Delhi.
[14] *Rajasthan*, 19 June 1936, Beawar.
[15] *Akhand Bharat*, 26 Nov. 1936, Bombay.
[16] *Bombay Samachar*, 27 June 1936.

But whatever Patel thought about it, the Sirohi Praja Mandal members refused to accept his advice:

> The leaders of the Congress are censuring us. . . . In order to ruin the administration of the sinful, the publication is necessary. The effect of publication on him is sure to be keen. Of course united consolidation is necessary, but publication is as necessary as the straight steps.[17]

And right up to the ruler's death in 1946 articles denouncing him continued to appear regularly in the nationalist press.

A Queer Figure

The life of an obscure or unknown person is not necessarily less representative of his times than that of a more famous one.[18] The life of the last ruler of Sirohi, although marked by many failures, exemplifies contradictions that many other people had to face, each in his own way, in the recent history of India.

Using a metaphor, the figure of Gandhi can be presented as a veritable Hegelian hero. He always believed in the possibility of a creative synthesis of all the divisions that seemed to characterize the society of his times, whether between colonizers and colonized, Hindus and Muslims, higher and lower castes, or more generally between tradition and modernity, or East and West. Gandhi represented himself as a living example and symbol of this wished-for synthesis.

Gandhi was always ready to stake his health, and if need be even his life, to restore social peace and harmony. Even more, he tended to consider himself as a microcosm of contemporary Indian society with all its conflicts and tensions. He even felt that the very existence of such conflicts was to a certain extent his own personal responsibility, implying imperfections in his own action. Paradoxically, it is possible to view Sarup Singh as an almost perfect antithesis of Gandhi. In his own individual way the last ruler of Sirohi was also exposed, just as intimately if not more so, to practically all the contradictions being experienced by Indian society. His life was divided not only between two

[17] Ibid.

[18] See in particular, for example, on Amar Singh, a Jaipuri noble, S. and L. Rudolph 1991.

religions, but also between at least three places of residence, and as many women and lifestyles.

In Sirohi he lived with his legal wives and daughters and kept up a façade of being a traditional Hindu ruler, conscious of his origins and proud of their traditions. In Bombay, with one of his mistresses and her illegitimate son, his life was more westernized; there he managed his financial affairs and indulged his passion for cars. When he lived in Delhi, in the company of his Muslim secretary and mistress, he displayed his affinities with Islam.

But unlike Gandhi, Sarup Singh's ecumenical tendencies were no public demonstration of faith in the possibility of a creative synthesis between the different traditions and currents of influence affecting modern India. On the contrary, Sarup Singh spent a great deal of effort keeping the different facets of his existence as hermetically sealed-off and confidential as possible. Nor did he feel the slightest urge to sacrifice himself to embody such an ecumenism. His broadmindedness seems to have been motivated mainly by the hope of personal benefit, and above all by his poor state of health.

For Sarup Singh suffered from all sorts of health problems, and throughout his life kept in touch with all kinds of people – anyone who offered him some hope of relief. His body became a real guinea-pig for experiments with all sorts of therapies, western medicine as well as the services of fakirs and *sadhus*. A certain Dr Bhatt, for example, advised him to consult a fakir, in these terms:

> His method of treatment is very simple but it yields good results. He writes something on a small paper in urdu language and places that paper in a specially charmed tawiz [amulet], and also gives some medicine.[19]

The influence such people might gain over their patients should not be underestimated. The above-mentioned fakir provides a good illustration: he felt free to write to Sarup Singh in 1938:

> When a fakir is displeased he is sure to give curses . . . I have full belief the persons who you depend on and trust are not for you but they are after you to put you in difficulty . . . as you have every faith in me,[20]

[19] C.O.L., f. 50, 1933.
[20] C.O.L., 4.11.1938.

and so on, mentioning moreover that he had bought two cars in the Raja's name, and needed money.

It seems from Sarup Singh's correspondence with the British from 1941 onwards that he had no illusions about his prospects:

> During this month I will be stepping into the 54th year of my life, and having implicit faith in the reading of my horoscope which shows that I have only five years to live, I am exceedingly anxious to prepare myself by religious meditation for my approaching end.[21]

He also recorded his wish to withdraw from State affairs, which was confirmed by the Political Resident in these words:

> Since the institution of the Council, H.H. attitude has been of indifference to all affairs in which his personal interests were not involved. . . . His main mundane preoccupations are his health and his morganatic wife, to whom he has made over as a gift his landed property in Delhi.[22]

Two months before this, Sarup Singh had visited the Maharaja of Alwar so that the latter could witness him personally signing a document in his presence. He did not reveal what it contained, but sent it to the British Resident for Rajputana. The contents were revealed only in February 1946, after Sarup Singh had died in Delhi. In it he confirmed not only that he had really been a Muslim convert since 1927, that is for no less than the last twenty years of his reign, but also that he had married the woman he lived with in Delhi, who was also a convert, according to Islamic rites. And he expressly requested that he should be interred in the Islamic way:

> I, Sir Sarup Ram Singh, G.C. Si. E, K.C.S.I., Maharao of Sirohi State, Rajputana, do hereby declare on solemn affirmation that after a diligent research, I became convinced of the real virtues of Islam, and voluntarily, with my own free will embraced Islam at Indore in 1927. Since then I have renounced the Hindu religion of my ancestors, have designated myself as Mohammed Umar and to the best of my capabilities followed the tenets of Islam, a fact which I am aware is in the knowledge of my trusted officials and intimate friends.[23]

[21] I.O.L., R.A., Pol. 185, 1942.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Copy of Sarup Singh's Will, accompanied by a correspondence dated 1946 between Pukhraj Singhi of Sirohi and the secretary of the Maharaja of Alwar confirming the latter's role as a witness in 1941, C.O.L., 1946.

All the propaganda against Sarup Singh, based mainly on the more or less fantastical accusations of his uncle Man Singh and rumours that had seemed pure scandal, was suddenly confirmed. But paradoxically, the people who had been his most unrelenting enemies for so many years were far from happy about this. The political climate of the subcontinent had radically changed since 1936. India's independence was imminent, and now it was only a matter of how the subcontinent would be divided up; and most of the people who had been trying to get the ruler's conversion publicly acknowledged for so long now wanted exactly the opposite: they wanted it hushed up.

Now we come to one of those strange episodes that punctuate history as it actually occurs. Pukhraj Singhi was kind enough to tell me the story of how two successive expeditions to Delhi were organized under his leadership, the first in 1946 and the second in 1947, to try to gain possession of the dead man's body so that it could be cremated as that of a Hindu ruler in Sirohi, rather than being buried as a Muslim in Delhi. The first attempt was thwarted by the British, who wanted to respect Sarup Singh's last wishes, and to avoid arousing any upheaval that might get out of control. The second however, undertaken during the disorders which took place during the first year of Independence, succeeded. The tomb containing Sarup Singh's remains was destroyed, and these were cremated on the spot. So ended the tragic destiny of the last prince to rule over the kingdom of Sirohi. But the dispute about who should succeed him, to which I shall return, went on, even after the kingdom had been officially dissolved.

8

The End of the Kingdom

Unlikely Alliances

In order to understand what happened in Sirohi in the twenty years leading up to Independence, we must take into account at least three very different factors: first the complex imbroglio of collective and individual strategies centering around the ruler himself and the question of his successor; then the development of the local nationalist movement, the Praja Mandal, which became increasingly active as time passed; and lastly the way in which traditional tensions in the kingdom took new forms in a changing context. The interaction of these different factors accounts for the complicated play of alliances that took shape over these years.

The Praja Mandal

The early years of the Praja Mandal's existence (1934–8) were marked, as we have seen, by a personal smear-campaign against the ruler, fed mainly by the more or less fantastic information supplied by his uncle. Vallabhai Patel complained about this to the Sirohi militants. But was he really in any position to voice any criticism?

The position taken by many of the leaders of the nationalist movement towards the Indian princely states was quite equivocal.[1] Gandhi and the right wing of the Congress always refused to put the rule of the princes on the same footing as that of the colonizers. This or that action might be denounced, but their legitimacy was not challenged as such so long as they treated their subjects with a degree of respect. It was only at the Extraordinary Session of the Congress held at Haripura in 1938 that the idea of extending

[1] See B.N. Ramusack 1988.

the nationalist struggle to the princely states was accepted in principle. And even then it was made clear that the activities of militants belonging to the Praja Mandal branches that had been established in almost all the princely states should not claim any direct links with the Congress. Moreover the demands which Gandhi recommended should be made in the states remained muted: rulers were to be asked only to moderate their private expenditure, and to carry out liberal judicial reforms on behalf of their subjects.

The Congress Party's policy, although strongly criticized by local militants, was nevertheless quite effective. We have already seen that in the 1920s the Chief Minister of Sirohi was none other than the son of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Practically the same situation was repeated at the beginning of the 1940s. During the 1930s two retired British civil servants in succession had headed the state government. But in 1939, at a time when local agitation was taking on wider dimensions, an Indian was once more designated Chief Minister, with the official support of the British, and the unofficial support of Gandhi.[2] This was I.K. Pandya, a native of Rajkot in Gujarat, and he too was closely connected with the leaders of the nationalist movement.

However, the moderating influence of one wing of the Congress did not put a stop to the activism of the local militants. In the years immediately following the Haripura Session, the activities of the Praja Mandal, which up till then had been practically limited to organizing propaganda from Bombay, now focussed within the kingdom itself. This was particularly due to young local militants who, like Pukhraj Singhi, had been influenced by leftist ideas or Gandhian ideals and wanted to work directly with the people. The activism of the Praja Mandal militants brought a new acuteness to most of the conflicts which had already been causing continual social and political tension in the kingdom for several decades.

In 1936 the Sirohi government made a fresh attempt to implement the judicial reforms it had tried to carry through on several previous occasions since 1923. And yet again the attempt met

[2] Letter from J.T. Pathak to Sarup Singh, reporting conversations with Patel and Gandhi about the agitation in Sirohi and recommending the nomination of I.K. Pandya. C.O.L., 18.4.1939.

organized opposition from the Jain community. In response to the promulgation of decrees they considered unfair to them, the Jains, united under the banner of the Nau Pargana Association,[3] adopted a policy of organized boycott of the local government, and also threatened to suspend all their economic activities in the kingdom. They not only refused to attend the courts or pay the various taxes imposed on them, but even stopped making any new loans to farmers, and began to withdraw their capital from the kingdom.[4]

Conflicts involving the nobles also illustrate the continuity of disputes in the kingdom. We may recall that after the 1920s the nobles and the local government had with difficulty reached a compromise about the status of their *jagirs*. Most of them had agreed to pay a part of their income to the State, no longer in kind but in cash, at a fixed rate negotiated at the time. But the nobles had been directly affected by a drop in agricultural prices during the 1930s, and were now complaining that the rate agreed on earlier was ruining them. In addition, hostility to the ruler was becoming increasingly widespread amongst the nobility. They were in general very conservative, and it would be difficult to say whether they were more shocked by the rumours about his religious inclinations, or by his declared intention to get his illegitimate son acknowledged as his heir and successor. Numerous police reports of 1936 relate to conspiracies amongst the Thakurs, activated by Man Singh and his son, who, as always, were trying to oust the ruler.[5]

So things took a familiar turn in 1940 when the administration again tried to carry out the land survey which it had had to abandon in the 1920s. This attempt was no more successful, for it aroused the resistance of the same nobles who had opposed it twenty years earlier. The Thakur of Rohua, rebelled yet again, transforming his domain into a fortified encampment. There were also protests from Brahmins, which once more took the traditional form of fasts and suicides.

In each of these cases however, a new element entered in: the

[3] The Nau Pargana Association was formed in 1924 to resist the judicial reform proposals of the local government, which affected the merchant community in particular.

[4] Mahajan Agitation, C.O.L., 1936.

[5] Reports of Superintendent of Police, Jodhpur, C.O.L., 19 June 1936 ff.

support now given to the resisters by the nationalists. We have been how the militants were already supporting from Bombay, the claims of Man Singh, the ruler's uncle, disseminating his press campaigns in their own papers. But they went further, lending more general support to the Thakurs' cause. Contact was established between the Sirohi nobles and the son of Jamna Lal Bajaj, the well-known industrialist who was the Congress Treasurer. From 1936 to 1940, we find frequent mention in criticisms of the government made by the Praja Mandal of the financial difficulties being experienced by the *jagirdars*. The nationalists also gave their support to the claims of the Brahmins.

They also tried to contact the tribals and incite them to mobilize again as they had done during Motilal's movement in 1922. Motilal had been covertly pursuing his programme of social reform, although on a much reduced scale, amongst tribal people in the small kingdoms bordering Gujarat and Rajputana. In 1925 advances were made by nationalists close to Gandhi, with the agreement of some British administrators, for him to be allowed to operate openly again, on condition that his activities were in future limited strictly to the social domain. But permission was again refused and, still under order of arrest, Motilal continued to live in hiding up to 1929, when he was arrested in the kingdom of Idar, and tried and condemned to imprisonment in Udaipur.[6] There was no really significant revival of tribal revolt in Sirohi during the 1930s, however. This is an important distinction between the situation in the late 1930s and the one during the 1920s.

Many Jains were members of the Praja Mandal, and the nationalist militants took charge of he Jain community's claims, giving them a wider and more radical scope than they had ever had before. Nevertheless the Mahajan movement, organized by the Nau Pargana Mahajan Association, had its own specific objectives: on one hand rejection of the new judicial reforms, which they felt were disadvantageous to them; and on the other, criticism of recruitment procedures to the State administration, which, they said, were detrimental to the educated youth of Sirohi, favouring outside elements, and Muslims over Hindus.

It is undeniable that a degree of anti-Islamic propaganda was developed at this time by the Praja Mandal militants; and this

[6] I.O.L., P.S., R.A., Idar State, n. 821:1928–9.

was not aimed solely at the ruler. They regularly denounced the behaviour of the Sirohi police and of the local officials responsible for collecting taxes, many of whom were Gujarati Muslims. The ruler was also accused of having presided over Islamic ceremonies, and of supporting an organized campaign of conversion to Islam that was being conducted, it was rumoured, amongst tribals in the Abu area.

Rhetoric Inverted

The direct involvement of nationalist militants in local conflicts also had the consequence of transforming the rhetoric in use on both sides. Up to this time, the colonial administration had always claimed that existing conflicts reflected resistance from the most traditional elements in local society: such troubles were the regrettable but inevitable consequence of the progress that was taking place. But when the nationalist militants entered the picture, officials found it difficult to maintain this kind of rhetoric. Although it might sometimes contradict the ways in which they supported the established interests of one group or another, in general the propaganda of the Praja Mandal militants focussed on one fundamental criticism of the State government: this was accused not so much of showing lack of respect for local traditions, but just the opposite. The nationalists accused the ruler, and indirectly the British, of deliberately obstructing any real spirit of reform in the kingdom. The British officials found themselves beaten at their own game. Now it was their turn to be accused of supporting the most reactionary elements amongst the populace, and of reluctance to implement reforms that were essential to social progress.

The British were increasingly confronted with a rather surrealistic situation in which they found themselves pleading for the maintenance of local traditions against militants who were appealing to the 'progressive' institutions of British India. This extract from a conversation between the British Resident and Gokulbhai Bhatt, President of the Praja Mandal, is a good example:

After formal introduction, the Hon'able Resident opened the conversation; following points were made:

1. Here, in States, you are trying to force the adoption of the British India form of government on the one hand and simultaneously

on the other hand, in British India, you are attacking the British India form of Government, as well.

2. In Indian States the form of government was not democracy, but there the ruler was the mabap who looked after the interests of his subjects as of his children. Traditionally the conditions in Indian States differed altogether from those in British India and yet you are trying to bring in the latter here. Is it your object to promote peace or hatred? . . . If the object of the State was the same as your own, why do you try to rush the pace where the people in these parts were admittedly backward.

Mr Gokulbhai: No, the people are not so backward as is thought. I find more literacy here than in other Rajputana States, and even the uneducated masses know more than expected.

Hon'able Resident: They might be more knowledgeable farmers, but know nothing of administration.[7]

Let us give another equally significant example. When the nationalist militants and the Jain community opposed the new judicial reforms, they chose their arguments and criticisms with care. What they objected to in the new laws was not their novelty; on the contrary, they claimed that under the pretext of modernizing the legal system, the legislation being introduced was much more reactionary than existing informal practice. They pointed out, for example, that in the new laws relating to moneylending – which were undeniably progressive and favourable to borrowers – the new code, based on that of British India, made different provisions for Muslims and Hindus, thus institutionalizing differences which had never existed before:

Your Highness will be pleased to note that on this side of the country, no difference exists in the manner of making money dealings between Hindus and Mahomedans. Their sons and grandsons are equally responsible for their debt just like the Hindus and courts used to grant decrees accordingly. But now slowly and slowly Hindu law is administered to the Hindus and Mohamedan law to the Mohamedans, while neither of these laws has yet been enforced here till now.[8]

On the other hand the Jains referred to their own special customs, also stressing their liberal nature, as a reason why they should not be covered by Hindu Law as a whole:

[7] C.O.L., n. 116:1941.

[8] Application dated 28.5.36 submitted by the Mahajans Panch of the nine parganas of Sirohi State to His Highness the Maharao Saheb Bahadur, C.O.L., 28.5.1936.

It also appears that we the Jains as well will be considered Hindus and treated henceforth in accordance with the Hindu Law. We Jains form a different 'nation' and especially in this State there is a vast difference between the Hindu law and our usages and practices.[9]

The British were well aware of the ideological danger the reforming zeal of the nationalist militants represented for them. This is quite clear from many reports which discuss the best way of undermining the Praja Mandal. One confidential report very clearly explains the alternatives the British administrators were faced with. This makes it worthwhile to quote in full a rather long passage from this document, which demonstrates the sort of realpolitik the English were practising:

Praja Mandals can be looked at from two angles. Are they a necessary evil, or can they be made harmless? Two courses are open:

A. To give way to them and buy peace at the cost of concessions, knowing that concessions will only bring a temporary halt, that they will be a stepping stone to more, until eventually a ruling organization will have been formed inside the State, and the ruler pushed on one side.

B. To rob them of their ammunition, namely their grievances. Make the advisory Committees stronger, enlarge them if necessary, be absolutely genuine in removing grievance in every sphere, and maintain and expand personal touch from the ruler downwards. This course requires strong purpose, constant work and real sacrifice. If these are lacking, wiser to adopt course A, but the Hon'able Resident prefers B, partly because A would weaken the position of the Princes as a body. In carrying out plan B, a distinction must be drawn between the association and its members. Plan B does not recognize any association, but its members are State subjects, must always remain part of the problem and must be brought into the plan.[10]

The outcome of these deliberations was that the Praja Mandal was proscribed for a time and its leaders arrested. But this had the effect of strengthening nationalism in the kingdom rather than weakening it. From 1939 onwards it can be stated that almost the entire Jain community was in full support of the Praja Mandal leaders, and convinced by their ideals as much as by their slogans and instructions.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Talks of I. MacGregor, Major Bradshaw and Mr Corfield, summarized for the ruler, C.O.L., 21.8.1939.

DIVISIVE GAMES

It cannot be denied that during the 1930s the local nationalists had little compunction in using anti-Islamic propaganda that was intended, above all, to bring the ruler into disrepute. At this period too, there is evidence of a general tendency on the part of the various different religious communities in the kingdom – Jains, Hindus and Muslims – to reinforce their specific identities by developing communal institutions. This trend reflected a general development in Indian society. Bernard Cohn as a historian and Louis Dumont as a social anthropologist were among the first to give full importance to the phenomenon of progressive closure and reification of collective identities as a result of colonization; previously the relations between the various elements of Indian society had been more complementary. Antagonisms between different religious communities which developed at this time may be seen partly as an outcome of this phenomenon.

But the example of Sirohi also undoubtedly confirms the accusation traditionally made against the British, that they tried to weaken the nationalist movement by deliberately creating dissension between the different communities, not only nationally but also locally. It is striking that the government of the kingdom, actively encouraged by British officials, really did everything in its power to discredit the local militants by trying to turn a political confrontation into intercommunal conflict. The strategy used by both local and British authorities against the nationalists was based on two logically contradictory stands: first, it minimized the political dimensions of the movement by presenting it in 'sociological' terms: on one hand categorizing it as a movement restricted to merchant castes and Brahmins: 'It is entirely a Bania and Brahmin movement, and there is no unanimity between Gokul Bhai, a Brahmin, and the banias';[11] and, on the other hand, by presenting it to the rest of the populace as a purely corporate movement whose logic and interests coincided exclusively with those of the Jain community in the kingdom. At the same time, since everyone knew that Gokulbhai Bhatt, the leader of the Praja Mandal, was a faithful follower of Gandhi and an important member of the Congress, the British took

[11] Confidential report of G.L. MacGregor, Chief Minister, C.O.L., Feb. 1939.

equal pains to show that the movement had no local base or autonomy and was only a minor tool for the national policy of the Congress Party. This accusation was politically astute, as long as it went against the wish of the Congress, reiterated in 1938, to avoid direct involvement in the politics of the Indian princely states.

This strategy was first used in the summer of 1936, when the merchant castes in the south of the kingdom, organized under the Nau Pargana Association, decided to support their claims by boycotting the local government and suspending all their usual economic activities. At this period, rivalry was growing within the merchant castes between the large Jain community that had always been in the kingdom and another community, the Agrawals, who were less numerous; these were Hindu merchant families, originally natives of the Punjab and Haryana, who had begun to settle in the kingdom, particularly since the nineteenth century. Since the Jains were tending to drop local trade and orienting their activities beyond the boundaries of the kingdom, the Agrawals were gradually replacing them inside it. They were also ready to trade in the predominantly tribal regions, where they were not regarded with the same suspicion as the Jains. Since they were less strict in their religious practices, the Jains accused them of trafficking in alcohol, and of practising usurious rates of interest when dealing with the tribals, which were offensive to the 'principles' of the traditional castes of the kingdom, now reinforced by their adherence to Gandhism.

When the merchant community instituted its boycott policy, the administration made an attempt to thwart it by getting the Agrawals to refuse to observe it. Initially they agreed, to the disappointment of the Jain merchants. The Agrawals were denounced in the nationalist press and warned that if they did not join the Jains, they would soon find their businesses ruined. The Jains threatened that as soon as their movement was over, they would sell at half price everything that the Agrawals were offering.[12] There were some stormy *panchayat* meetings amongst the Agrawals, between supporters and opponents of the boycott. Finally they submitted, and

[12] Confidential report of Mirza Wahed Beg, C.O.L., 1936. See also I.O.L., P.D., Pol. 4578:1942 (in L/P.S./1430), where it states that 'the association is now referred to as the "Banya Mandal" rather than the "Praja Mandal"'.

articles in the nationalist press, which had first been accusatory, suddenly became more approving.[13]

In 1936 the Sirohi government did not stop at attempting to obstruct the Jains' boycott through the Agrawals. Throughout these years it attempted to discredit their movement by reviving the traditional tensions between Jains and the rest of the populace. One of their aims was to mobilize the nobility against them. As we have seen, the national movement had been able to win over one section of the Thakurs by echoing their complaints against the ruler and supporting Sarup Singh's uncle. The British exerted themselves to destroy this rapprochement. For example, they made clear to Man Singh that if he hoped to have his interests given any consideration by the British, he would be well advised to break off all contact with the Praja Mandal:

I told him that I had heard rumours that he was making himself accessible to the Praja Mandal. . . . He admitted this and said that he would sever his connection with that society from today.[14]

More generally, the British had tried to get the local administration to conciliate the nobles as much as possible, so that they should not side with the nationalists:

That being so, the darbar is not in a position to apply pressure on them [the Thakurs] if they wish to show their loyalty to the state in its hours of trial it would be ungrateful to take action.[15]

Now they tried to play on the nobles' latent hostility towards the Jains by convincing the Thakurs that the nationalist movement was nothing but a veiled attempt of the Jains to gain power. This view was summed up by a Thakur who supported it, as follows: 'We want Deora Raj, not Banya Raj'.

The government also tried to sow dissension between the Jains and the rest of the populace. So during the 1936 boycott it organized a campaign of petitions from citizens of the kingdom, violently denouncing the merchant community:

In these days the Banyas have, as a protest against the laws, stopped all dealings with us. Whatever harvest we had reaped has deceitfully been

[13] *The Rajasthan*, 20 July and 3 August 1936.

[14] Comments of Allington on Man Singh, addressed to I.K. Pandya, C.O.L., 21.1.1941.

[15] Report on the Rohua agitation, C.O.L., 26.1.1939.

taken away by the Mahajans. . . . The Mahajans have started this boycott campaign to ruin us and they are telling us besides that they will consider our case if we join them, otherwise they will ruin us. . . . The State helps the Mahajans at all times and in all matters, but their number if compared to us is not even one-sixteenth of us. We work day and night and pay Hansil to the State from whatever harvest we reap. The rest of the grain after payment of Hansil is taken away in major proportion by the Mahajans as if they were locusts.[16]

In another similar petition a whole series of accusations are addressed to the Mahajans:

Sirohi is in such a state of Banya rule that its Mahajans do not stand in need of law and want to carry on the State administration without law so that in the absence of laws they may derive as much of undue advantage as they please. . . . You believed that it was your birthright to keep Rajputs as Sepoys, or in other words, your servants, to employ Brahmins only in cooking your food, and to make the other castes work for you in begar. Is this incorrect?[17]

In the course of the 1930s, by a process of successive simplification, the nationalist movement in the kingdom was deliberately made to appear first as a movement of the merchant castes, and then more specifically as a movement of Jains. To reinforce this, the anti-nationalist propaganda echoed themes that had been voiced against the Jains in the 1920s during the Anop Das agitation. This was not a matter of chance, for this time the local authorities, backed by the British, who had previously condemned the movement, agreed in 1940 to register it officially – although some time later, after the Praja Mandal had been made illegal and several of its leaders were under arrest, this decision was reversed. During the 1940s several new incidents against Jains erupted. Jain ascetics *(muni)* were attacked by Bhils and Girasias who had got drawn into the movement.[18] And for the first time there were also clashes between Jains and Vaishnavas over religious matters which had never caused any comment before: there was a long drawn out quarrel from 1941 to 1943 in the

[16] Petition of 28 June 1936 addressed by the subjects of Mandar Pargana to His Highness, C.O.L., 28.6.1936.

[17] Answer to the Mahajans after their meeting held at Parisar, C.O.L., 1936.

[18] See for example I.O.L., P.D., R.A., P.Y., 1940. 'There had been a disturbance at Bamanwarjo where Bhils and Girassia collected with a view to attacking a Jain *sadhu* which they held responsible for the failure of the monsoon'.

village of Jawal about the organization of rites in a temple of Ambaji which had so far been used by Jains and Hindus without distinction.

The nature of this local opposition to the Praja Mandal activists and the nationalist movement, identified with the Jain community in this way, should be examined further. Quite apart from the manipulations of the authorities, there is no doubt that the nationalist movement had gradually taken on a more markedly class tinge, as has often been noted. Former freedom fighters have explained to me that in fact they regret not having been able to make more contact with the tribal people at this time – as Motilal had managed to do fifteen years earlier – and involve them more in the movement. And on the other hand it is probably not a matter of chance that the Anop Das activists found a favourable response amongst the Bhils and Girasias during this period.

The End of the Kingdom

The few years leading up to Independence saw the establishment of a progressive rapprochement between the Praja Mandal and the government of the kingdom after antagonism between nationalist militants and the local government had reached a climax between 1936 and 1945. Also in 1945 we can note the continuance of incidents of a kind that is now familiar to us: yet again, the nobles succeeded one last time in preventing surveying being carried out on their estates, while Brahmins in Rajghar maintained their long-standing conflict with the government.

From 1945 onwards however, the situation changed rapidly. Sarup Singh, under pressure from the British to stop prevaricating, had to resign himself to adopting a child, Tej Singh of Mandar, as his heir. The throne was to revert to him, since Sarup Singh's illegitimate son could not be recognized, and the candidature of his uncle and the latter's son was set aside. But when the British discovered that Sarup Singh had really been converted to Islam, they realized that the late adoption of Tej Singh would certainly be contested; so in the end they only reserved the right to designate a successor to the ruler when the time came.

When Sarup Singh died one year later, in 1946, the English supported the choice of Tej Singh, in spite of opposition from

several quarters. The enthronement of this prince, who was still only a child, in fact confirmed the authority of I.K. Pandya, the all-powerful Chief Minister. Although in the beginning this man had the approval of Gandhi and Patel, he had never hesitated to repress the nationalist militants severely. But barely one year later, on 15 August 1947, India was declared Independent. Immediately Gokulbhai Bhatt and the other leaders of the Praja Mandal embodied, beyond any doubt, the only legitimate power. Gokulbhai Bhatt became Chief Minister, and Pukhraj Singhi, one of the most active Praja Mandal militants, was made a minister with the title of Popular Minister.

So in 1949, practically two years after India became Independent, it paradoxically seemed as if the Kingdom of Sirohi had finally regained political stability. A Deora Rajput, legitimate if not acceptable to everyone, had been recognized as heir to the throne. More decisively, the State government was now headed by local leaders of the Praja Mandal, which meant that Jains and Brahmins from local elite groups had again recovered the reins of authority. As a last and perhaps most impressive sign of this return to tradition, no sooner had Tej Singh been enthroned than factions started forming to depose him and . . . succeeded: in 1949 a new commission was appointed to open the file on the succession. Sarup Singhs' illegitimate son, Lakhpat Ram Singh, and Man Singh's son Abey Singh, each made yet another attempt to get their claims accepted. Abey Singh, who had the support of the Maharani, the Raja of Jamanagar, and even the Praja Mandal leaders and Patel himself, won the day. In late 1950, the dearest wish of Sarup Singh's uncle was fulfilled: his son at last acceded to the throne of Sirohi.

It might seem as if the history of Sirohi in the first half of the twentieth century essentially coincided with the story of a long collective learning process. During this period the local people – and especially elite groups – shaken by successive waves of change stirred up by the nineteenth century colonization, managed in a dynamic and often creative way, to adapt to the new situation and re-establish their positions in society.

But a completely new era in the history of modern India had begun. The apparent restoration that seemed to prevail in Sirohi for a brief moment was only veiling more decisive developments taking place on a national scale. In January 1950, the kingdom

was constitutionally dissolved and its territories were divided between the newly-constituted states of Rajasthan and Gujarat. In one sense, everything had to be started all over again.

POSTSCRIPT

This partition of the former Kingdom of Sirohi between Gujarat and Rajasthan revealed yet again the internal contradictions of its social and political structure. As mentioned above, an unspoken borderline divides the merchant castes of Rajasthan. For most Marwaris from the seventeenth century onwards, their economic horizons extended towards the north-east. On the other hand, the merchant communities of western Rajasthan turned their eyes in the opposite direction, towards Gujarat. This certainly did not apply to the Rajputs. They belonged to a wide network of alliances that still centred on Rajasthan. Even today it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Sirohi Jains see Rajasthan as a land dominated by Rajputs, while Rajputs perceive Gujarat as an unattractive example of a region dominated by merchant castes.

So after Independence, when the question as to which of the two newly-created states the former kingdom of Sirohi would be included in arose, there were two options. Supporters of the two alternatives were all the more violently opposed because the real thing at stake was, as always, into which state Mount Abu would fall. Vallabhai Patel, born in Gujarat, was able to tilt the balance in favour of his native state, to the great indignation of everyone who felt it should be part of Rajasthan. In a climate of polemic debate and struggle for influence, the territory of Sirohi was divided. Mount Abu and its surroundings were annexed to Gujarat, while the rest of the territory was included in Rajasthan. Gokulbhai Bhatt, former chief of the Praja Mandal and one of the most eminent Congressmen in Rajasthan, found himself in an extremely awkward position. He was a close friend of Patel, but had been made Congress President in the newly-constituted state of Rajasthan. In the political climate of the times, it did not take long for Rajasthanis to make him personally responsible for having 'lost' Mount Abu, through his friendship with Patel.

All this happened in 1952, in a political climate that was made more difficult by a revival of tension between Congress and Rajputs, as a result of new regional laws being passed in an

attempt to destroy the 'feudal' power of the *jagirdars* once and for all. In Sirohi, at a time when harvests were poor again, this led to a return of the familiar spectre of the Anop Das movement, which now became more or less identical with the *jagirdars'* movement to resist the new tax laws introduced in Nehru's India. Moreover Sirohi had been made part of a larger constituency that also included Pali district, formerly part of the kingdom of Marwar. The outcome was that despite his fame, Gokulbhai Bhatt lost the first legislative elections in 1952 to a brother of the Raja of Jodhpur.

Hardly two years after its dissolution, not only had the former kingdom of Sirohi lost its territorial identity in the new administrative and political demarcation of the region, the local nationalist leaders had also been sidelined. It was only in 1956, after years of dispute between Rajasthan and Gujarat, that as a result of a general reorganization of states all over India, Mount Abu was returned to Rajasthan. The present Sirohi district once again corresponds exactly to the territories of the old kingdom — a considerable advantage to anyone interested in its history.

9

Truth and Violence

Society Dismembered

In pre-colonial India, a multiplicity of patterns gave society its shape. And as specialists in colonial history have now shown, the British deliberately strengthened elements of this social structure that presented no threat to their hegemony and fostered the social stability they wished for. In Rajasthan this applied to the caste system, and to most institutions connected with princely rule.

Particularly in the Indian princely states, the colonizers never aimed at a complete reorganization of society. But they had a quite precise idea of the kind of social order they would like to see evolving. In Rajasthan the 'tribal' people were kept under close military surveillance, and like other 'martial' groups, were strongly encouraged to join the Imperial Army; rulers were supposed to become modern statesmen; the Thakurs should become enterprising landowners, and limit their role to that; the merchant castes ought to confine themselves to economic activities; Brahmins and Charans, if sufficiently intelligent and well-educated, could become State employees or join the liberal professions. The rest of the population were supposed to remain peaceable artisans and farmers. And the British did not consider this concept incompatible with their picture of the traditional social order – but rather as a natural extension of it.

But in Rajasthan, colonial intervention ultimately and paradoxically had a much greater effect than the British intended. They deluded themselves (following James Tod in particular) that they were simply restoring this society and its institutions to a former state, after saving the region from the Marathas. And their declared intention was to lead it to a state of prosperity, from which, of course, they hoped to be the main beneficiaries. If their actions

had a different impact, this was because interventions they thought of as nothing but police actions or the modernization of local institutions, actually affected fundamental driving forces of society.

For there were other aspects of social practice that contradicted their objectives, which they wanted to neutralize. These included, for example, the networks of influence and alliance interlinking various sectors of society. This was a determining factor that lay at the heart of existing social and political structures; but it seemed to conflict with the division of roles that corresponded to the image of local society the British had formed for themselves, and which they now tried to impose upon it.

This applied, for example, to what they perceived as the pernicious influence that traditional specialists in knowledge and beliefs had over men in power. The colonizers forced one ruler of Sirohi to abdicate because they disapproved of the hold that Brahmins and *sadhus* had over him. And they abrogated to themselves many functions traditionally performed by Brahmins or Charans, such as constituting a past, advising rulers, allotting praise and blame to them, and supervising their education.

The British also tried to exclude merchant elites from the administration, seeing them as mere parasites upon authority. Instead, they tried to establish a body of official employees who would be less susceptible to local pressure. But when they tried to implement this principle, they were disappointed to find that relations between the ruler, represented by his State officials, and the populace became even more disorderly than before. This was particularly true in territories controlled by Thakurs or tribal communities, which in fact made up most of the kingdom.

Above all, the colonial authorities could not tolerate the continuous uprisings and rebellions that characterized the dynamics of this society, continuously redefining balances of power between its various components. Especially because, quite apart from the disorder and violence that such revolts involved, here again the colonizers became aware that values and solidarity networks were at work which they could neither control nor influence through the official institutions of the kingdom. So they were always trying to disrupt the links that got established between different sectors of the population during these rebellions. They frequently had to resort to military action, although this contravened their policy of keeping their intervention in the region as indirect as possible,

concerned, as they always were, to keep it economical in both material and human terms.

I have tried to show that aspects which the British thought of as the effects of pure parasitism and disruption upon the State and the social order, in fact constituted fundamental connections that were crucial to the workings of local society. In this perspective I have examined a set of situations and traditions which have some characteristics in common: the protagonists, belonging to one or more castes and communities, confront each other to redefine their mutual relationships. Such situations, which recurred constantly, put to the test principles on which the balance of society rested, as well as any ideological consensus within it, and the forms of interdependence characterizing it.

All the situations analysed in this study show ways in which individuals, or more or less united communities, used their own specific traditions, positions and status to establish balances of power that were in their favour. Even more interestingly, they did this by provisionally challenging the very principles on which their inclusion in the institutions characterizing the dominant social order depended. This applied to nobles who rebelled or tribal groups who revolted; to Brahmins or Charans who threatened to commit collective suicide; and also to Jains or farming castes or artisans, when their representatives decided to emigrate *en masse* from a Thakur's domain or from the kingdom.

Each of these situations and traditions involved a process not only of self-definition, but the definition of a relationship with others, along with a more general appeal to an overall order and shared ideology. Through very different behaviour patterns, each group challenged their opponents to redefine their stance, in order to maintain the bonds that united them.

So each of these cases, beyond all their apparent differences, appealed to the same principle: an individual or a community, in response to a challenge facing it, or one which it wants to put to others, would take the risk of partially or entirely breaking the links binding it to the framework of institutions or beliefs that were central to the functioning of society. This would apply equally well to the institution of kingship, or to the relationship between a Thakur and his dependents.

We might wonder if this type of behaviour, based on a threat to withdraw, has not always been one fundamental cultural factor

in Indian society, pervading its entire social logic and extending beyond the purely individual domain where it has most often been considered, in the many studies that have focussed on the significant figure of the renouncer.

Such actions must certainly have been, at the outset, gestures of defiance, either individual or collective. But it would be a mistake to analyse them solely as the expression of a challenge to the existing institutions and the social order. First because these were highly ritualized forms of behaviour, whose use was no less traditional than the institutions they provisionally challenged. But also because it is legitimate to ask whether these forms of conduct were intrinsic to the institutions, relationship systems and beliefs most characteristic of local society. In such instances the essential values on which collective life was based were tested, but also reaffirmed – just as the delicate balances on which social cohesion rested were redefined.

Society Normalized

One of the main obstacles the colonial authorities found themselves facing arose from the fact that the society they wanted to control was regulated, paradoxically, by principles that were far too 'liberal' for their taste. Most of the attributes that the western mind has gradually come to associate with the idea of public power were present. But they were distributed amongst many different agents, embedded in the life of the society. This applied, for example, to the use of armed force; but it was no less true of the exercise of justice, the definition of rights connected with land, and even the right to levy taxes. It was not simply that rulers exercised no effective monopoly in any of these domains; their right to such a monopoly had never been clearly defined, despite the claims they soon began to make.

And there were many other areas of collective life that operated on the same principles. One example would be civil status. We have seen that there were specialists (the Bhats), who maintained registers detailing the status of their clients. These were often more complete than their European equivalents. But this expertise remained a private and decentralized preserve, since the registers were the Bhats' private property. Another example, which in practice was less disconcerting to the English but which they

nevertheless had to confront, was that of economic activity. It was not the State but the merchants who held a monopoly over techniques of economic and financial management, very well adapted to local conditions and in no way inferior to their Western parallels.

We could cite many more examples to show that the wealth of these skills and forms of expertise was equalled only by their dispersion throughout society. One of the main consequences of this was the wide range of variation in standards underlying these practices. As François Ewald has shown, the key to the modernization and 'rationalization' of Western society was a long-drawn-out and complex historical process which has not always been given the attention it deserves. This was a gradual homogenization of the standards underlying social usage in all domains.[1] This is an important fact which explains many of the differences that are still often seen between 'modern' societies and those that have remained more 'traditional'. One of the main consequences of Western colonization may have been, after all, to set this process of standardization and homogenization in motion on a global scale.

This explains why the colonial history even of such a 'marginal' area as Sirohi has to be analysed in the light of the successive upheavals that were experienced in this process of homogenizing society according to standards set, at the time, by the colonial powers. And it is not a matter of chance that the events that have been analysed here were, almost without exception, precipitated by reforms initiated by the government in order to standardize practices and information in various areas of collective life.

In practically all these domains we find the same debate. Whether it is a matter of the use of force, the exercise of justice, economic practices or rights of different kinds, traditional usage was always highly diversified and coloured by the particular circumstances and protagonists involved. The concepts of violence, of justice, right, truth had their equivalents, of course. But the ways in which these were applied in collective life were based on different principles than those activated by the colonial ideology. For this reason all reforms based on these notions, taken in their Western senses, led to the introduction of standards very different from those that had characterized existing practices.

[1] F. Ewald 1986.

This confrontation was made more acute by the fact that colonial policy had the effect of strengthening the rulers and their administrations, at the same time encouraging them, not always consciously, to break their traditional ties with other sectors of society. And this break was more strongly perceived as increasing differences in standards of conduct and values developed between a minority which adopted the new standards and the majority which continued to react according to more traditional criteria.

In fact we find one common feature in practically all the changes that occurred during the colonial period: traditions that had always been socially acceptable were suddenly seen in a new light, because the colonial government was re-evaluating them, without regard for the social and cultural underpinnings which until then had if not justified at least legitimized their use. Whole ranges of local culture acquired a new 'strangeness', not only in Western eyes but also for ever-growing numbers of ordinary people. This phenomenon was so widespread, even in areas such as Rajasthan where colonial intervention remained on the whole discreet, that it deeply affected society as a whole.

THE 'PERLIN' EFFECT

All the events described above have another feature in common: they formed part of a reality that was new, not because they were new in themselves, but because they involved both new kinds of expertise and new modes of transmission.

In fact one of the most significant features of British colonization in this kind of context is that it cannot be seen simply as the encounter of two nations, two cultures or two civilizations. First because the British presence consisted of an extremely limited number of individuals, almost all of whom were either soldiers or administrators. But above all because on the British side the effect of this encounter was essentially limited to the implementation of extremely specific and specialized skills, practices and forms of behaviour; and it was only on the margin of these skills that another, more intuitive kind of knowledge began to develop amongst the English in India, which was all the more fictional and loaded with stereotypes because it was normally based on very limited knowledge and experience.

In conformity with the epistemological models of the time,

these specialized forms of expertise were essentially based on two sorts of paradigms: the 'indicial' paradigm that Carlo Ginzburg has attempted to define,[2] and another one that is only apparently contradictory with it, related to a phantasm of exhaustiveness, which found a favoured field in the activities of the colonial civil service.

The 'indicial' paradigm, resulting from both an ideology of law and an ideology of history, led the British administrators to consider as relevant only information supported by 'evidence', in a sense that a historian or a judge would find acceptable. From this standpoint, the expertise of the bards had no value unless, transcribed by Tod or others, it gained the status of historical fact. Similarly the land rights of this or that group would only be acknowledged if the people could furnish 'documentary evidence' in support of their claims. Any other expression of social memory or tradition, that might provide alternative forms of access to the truth, was simply disregarded.

As a result, practically all social records had to be reconstituted. And here the other, equally powerful paradigm came into play, that of exhaustiveness. As we have seen, the colonial history of the kingdom was punctuated by repeated attempts on the part of both local and colonial administrations to implement exhaustive informational arrangements, along with all that this implied: rewriting regional history, redrawing frontiers, establishing an exhaustive accounting system for State revenues, exhaustive definition of the land rights of every individual, carrying out a census and a land survey, creating a new legal code, constant official enquiries and regular reports on the state of the kingdom: this was the register on which the colonial presence was really played out.

Nowadays we are more aware that the information that emerged on the basis of this dual paradigm was not only restricted but largely fictional. The methodological price to be paid for this, however, as Perlin has shown so well for the documentation that has come down to us from the Mogul and Maratha periods, is not simply to fill in the obvious gaps in the corpus inherited from the colonial administrative culture: we must also grasp the significance of the changes brought about by the implementation of these new kinds of expertise and procedure. This requires us

[2] C. Ginzburg 1989.

to circumvent the pitfall of a purely discursive concept of history, and take into consideration the effects which the implementation of these norms had upon society as a whole. This is what I have attempted to do here.

This meant, for example, that a great change took place when noble revolts were viewed in these new narrative registers. Instead of providing material for Charans' tales, these acts of rebellion now led to statements in court, which were used to condemn the instigators; similarly with threats of suicide from Brahmins or Charans, which had previously been used to bolster their legitimacy and maintain their independent status as truth-tellers in the face of intimidation from men in power.

In the same way, the constantly reiterated demand of the colonial authorities that sources of State revenue should be clearly identified clashed with the traditional logic by which the local economy had been managed by Banias. The land survey, which sparked off most of the troubles which erupted during the time of the Non-Cooperation Movement, involved all the principles on which the ruler's authority over the kingdom as a whole was based. Here again, what was essentially new was not the respective positions taken up by the various parties, but the attempt to deal with the question in a new discursive mode based on a reference apparatus which appealed, in an unfamiliar way, to history and law.

THE NEW MEDIATORS

James Tod was not only Rajputana's official historian for more than a century; he began his career as its first Postmaster-in-Chief. For the British introduced new means of communication as well as new kinds of knowledge. And in one way the history of the colonial presence in the kingdom of Sirohi can be seen as the story of the time it took its people to reappropriate not only the content of the information that the foreigners tried to impose on them, but also the means of communicating it.

We have seen how uprisings of both nobles and tribals became more effective when they targetted not local peasants or officials but the methods of gathering and communicating the new kinds of information. The tribals attacked officials appointed to carry out the census in their areas, while the Thakurs prevented surveying on their domains, or intercepted the mail.

Above all, these new means of communication gradually gained new uses. Motilal represented a first stage of this development, when he discovered his vocation as a leader by reading and then copying and disseminating a tract written by Vijay Singh Pathik; or when his first action as a militant was to prepare a book of collective complaints which he tried – although unsuccessfully – to present to the ruler. On the other hand, protests about the repression of his movement were all the more effective because disseminated by nationalists in the guise of newspaper reporters who were simply enquiring about the facts. From this time on, those who were resisting the British began systematically collecting statements from victims in support of their arguments; so that enquiries and counter-enquiries became common and were often published separately in pamphlets that were easy to distribute. It was through the press too, that Gandhi publicized his disavowal of Motilal's activities. We may also recall that for many years the activities of the Praja Mandal were restricted to publishing a newspaper (the *Sirohi Sandesh*) and conducting press-campaigns against the ruler.

This gradual appropriation of the new means of communication was not confined to the nationalist movement. The Anop Das movement against the Jains was spread by ballads, but also by selling inexpensive copies of his writings in several languages. It was at this time too that the ruler of Sirohi had a history of his realm compiled. Its author, G.S. Ojha, was introduced to him in these terms:

> His history of the Solankis has won him the admiring gratitude of the leading workers in Indian archaeology. With the synthetic genius of a Sherlock Holmes, he can trace up a whole order of historical data from a worn-out corn, a rusty copper-plate or some obscure inscription on the parapet wall of a deserted well.[3]

On the other hand, as we have seen, the Thakurs were particularly prolix petition-writers, sometimes aided by nationalist lawyers. And when Man Singh was intriguing against the ruler, he turned out to be an enthusiastic telegraphist, sending long anonymous telegrams denouncing Sarup Singh to the editors of newspapers all over India.

This context accounts for the decisive role that the nationalists

[3] C.O.L., Mekhma Khas, n. 395:1902.

were able to play, although they were so few in numbers to begin with. The new information and power systems had disrupted traditional channels of influence between people and government. The example of Motilal is illuminating about this, for we can see how the social groups normally responsible for communicating between tribal communities and the authorities (mainly Brahmins, Charans and Thakurs) had been marginalized by this time, and were therefore unable to play this role fully. Moreover the new intermediaries appointed by the authorities (police officers and local officials) proved quite incapable of mediating in any way between the government and the people; on the contrary, they were one of the main targets of attack in the tribal revolt. Even the Bhil contingents under British command could only play a part in repressing the movement. The rulers of these small princedoms, involved by the English in reform programmes whose consequences they were unable to control, and often, as in Sirohi, deep in personal identity crises, had in most cases lost all political autonomy and were unable to take any independent initiatives.

The nationalists filled this gap. They were called in by the British and the ruler, as well as by the rebel groups, to mediate between the various parties. It is significant that in Sirohi in 1922, as we have noted, the three men who tried to intervene between Motilal's movement and the British embodied the three main strands of the nationalist movement, and were moreover positioned on both sides of the dispute. Rama Kant Malaviya's father was the leader of the most conservative branch of the nationalist movement. He played his role of Chief Minister to the full, taking responsibility for putting down Motilal's movement, and even making use of his contact with Gandhi to get him to issue a public disavowal of Motilal. Gandhi agreed to do this, even though he later sent one of his most trusted followers (Manilal Kothari) to evaluate the real tone of the movement. Vijay Singh Pathik, who embodied the left wing of the nationalist movement, was as eager as the others to defuse the tribal revolt, fearing that it might degenerate completely. But this did not prevent him from criticizing the role played by Rama Kant Malaviya in these events. So it was as if Motilal's tribal revolt, instead of being just a confrontation between the people and the government, was being played out in a new arena in which each of the protagonists in one way

or another represented the main trends of the nationalist movement. Similarly, right up to Independence there were still nationalist militants supporting the Thakurs or the ruler's uncle by pleading their case legally or politically.

Discussions about the class-position of the nationalist movement and its various components are in danger of masking this primary fact: the nationalist activists owed their success at the local level to the fact that they were the only ones who could mediate, at a time when most of the existing mediation processes of society were no longer able to fulfil this role, for all the reasons I have tried to investigate in this study.

THE LOGIC OF GANDHISM

I would like to conclude by considering one last question: historians have often remarked that the methods of non-cooperation and passive resistance advocated by Gandhi were not his personal invention; they echoed methods used by Brahmins and others to support their claims in traditional contexts. The ideal of non-violence had always been central to the Jain religion; and Jain precepts were widely familiar to all Gujarati merchant castes. So it is quite probable that Gandhi, who came from a Gujarati Hindu merchant caste, was influenced by this background when he recommended methods of resisting the British, first in South Africa and later in India, that combined passive resistance with non-violent ideals.

But this does not explain why the figure of Gandhi and the methods he advocated had such a rapid and widespread impact upon Indian society as a whole. For it was only with the success of Gandhism that the rather complacent idea that non-violence had always been the basis of Indian civilization became common. And it is worth noting that Gandhi himself had reservations on this point.[4]

The considerations above, on the other hand, give us a better understanding of some of the sociological bases for this success.

[4] Gandhi contended that, contrary to the general impression, there was a deep streak of violence in Indian culture. He chided his close friend C.F. Andrews for arguing that non-violence was the central theme of major Indian scriptures, 'I see no sign of it in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, not even in my favourite Tulsidas' . . . in B. Parekh 1989.

For, as Sirohi exemplifies, a combination of factors explains how the nationalist movement developed over the thirty-odd years leading up to Independence.

The first of these was the existence of a set of traditions which took the form of a threat by an individual or community to break the ties that bound them to the rest of society. It is striking that the Non-Cooperation Movement initiated by Gandhi was a very exact re-use of this principle, this time directed against the colonial authorities.

Only in Indian tradition these threats to cut connections took such diverse forms that it was difficult to discern the common factor. What apparent resemblance was there between a Charan threatening to commit suicide, some nobles in revolt, a Brahmin undertaking a fast, and some tribal communities envisaging a new kingdom? In each case very distinct values, ideals and standards of behaviour were invoked to justify the actions and to influence their outcome.

And here another factor enters the picture. For in fact it was the British who grouped these practices together, by considering them under a single heading. Relative to the law and order they were trying to establish, a noble in revolt was a criminal just as much as the mercenary he recruited or the Charan who incited his family to commit suicide as a protest. On the other hand the distinctive feature of all these different forms of violence was that traditionally each of them had a certain legitimacy: the noble and the Charan each felt so sure of their rights that, unlike the British, they thought that if anyone was at fault it was those who had driven them to such extremities. This means that the British created a complete reversal of values when they decreed that in future all forms of violence must be condemned as such, regardless of any context that might traditionally have justified them, or the identity of the person committing or subjected to them. This postulate was the basis of all British action. And strangely enough, this was a postulate which Gandhi also took up and affirmed with equal determination, but this time turning it against the British themselves.

The guiding lines of the Gandhian message in the 1920s – non-cooperation and non-violence – found a favourable response from ordinary people because they echoed realities that the whole population was facing; although the call for non-violence had

previously come from the colonial authorities, whereas the principle of non-cooperation had traditionally been used as a means of exerting pressure in conflicts between different sectors of local society. Gandhi's outstanding originality consisted, as we know, in fusing these two attitudes into a single stance. Non-violence ceased to be what the English had always insisted it should be: the indispensable precondition for any negotiation with local society. In Gandhism it became the exact opposite: a more radical demand than the British had ever thought of, exposing the fact that they were unable to perpetuate their hegemony except by the use of force and violence. In the face of the ideological edifice of colonial power, this was a response of such pertinence that it took almost all contemporary protagonists by surprise – most nationalists just as much as the British officials. The question now is to find out just how effective this response has been.

This question will not be finally settled. I have tried to show that when Gandhi arrived on the scene, the struggle had already been going on for quite some time; and contrary to what has often been thought, it was going on not only amongst cultured or urban elites, but also in areas and amongst groups that might seem, as in Sirohi or other princely states, to be least obviously affected by colonization. And as we have seen, the various protagonists might, without hesitation, use the very weapons they most condemned in their adversaries. The Sirohi archives quite unambiguously reveal many situations where both sides found themselves confronted with unfamiliar dilemmas involving definitions of truth, the use of force, the nature of law, or definition of the very values and traditions they were appealing to in their actions or arguments.

In other terms, the questions raised by Gandhi about the use of violence or of truth in certain situations of collective life were not only, at this time, a matter of discussion between militants about whether pacifist or legal methods would bring about Independence or not. Nor did his arguments simply echo ethical questions raised by any cultural or social minority.[5] His approach

[5] This is the limitation of analyses that lay too much stress on the connection between Gandhi's ideals and those of his native community (middlemen castes of Gujarat, influenced by Jainism and Vaishnavism); see for example, I.H. Mehta 1985–6.

contributed to a debate that was already in progress and much more widely spread throughout Indian society – a debate that had been initiated by the colonialists' challenge to traditional uses made of violence and truth in contexts that were of key importance to the ordinary workings of society.

So the initial impact of Gandhism may have been due primarily to the fact that it was able to give expression to basic questions affecting the whole country, confronted as it was by all kinds of effects of colonial rule, and thus echoed problems that everyone was facing. This is what he himself always claimed, although not many people agreed with him. It must also be said that although he was probably not mistaken about the problems which society as a whole was facing, he was very optimistic about the solutions to them. In Sirohi many people were experiencing conflicts that were not so remote from his own experience, and they could identify themselves, at least partially, with his actions. But the solutions they aimed at were very diverse, and certainly not all of them were welcomed by Gandhi.

At the beginning of this book, I drew attention to the considerable progress that has been made in the historical study of India over recent decades. Shahid Amin's fine article on Gandhi, which has been referred to several times, is certainly an example of this. But in my view, its sociological perspective fails to do full justice to the wealth of historical detail that he has brought to light. The richness of historical understanding makes it impossible for us to be satisfied today with the kind of sociological or anthropological analyses which have too often been presented without sufficient consideration for the intricacies of history. I myself am aware that the attempt made here is still far from complete, and that some of the points outlined are insufficiently developed. But I shall be happy if it helps to redirect sociological and anthropological attention towards enriching our understanding of the history of modern India rather than impoverishing it, as has too often been the case. For like history, sociology too can reveal an ever-changing landscape.

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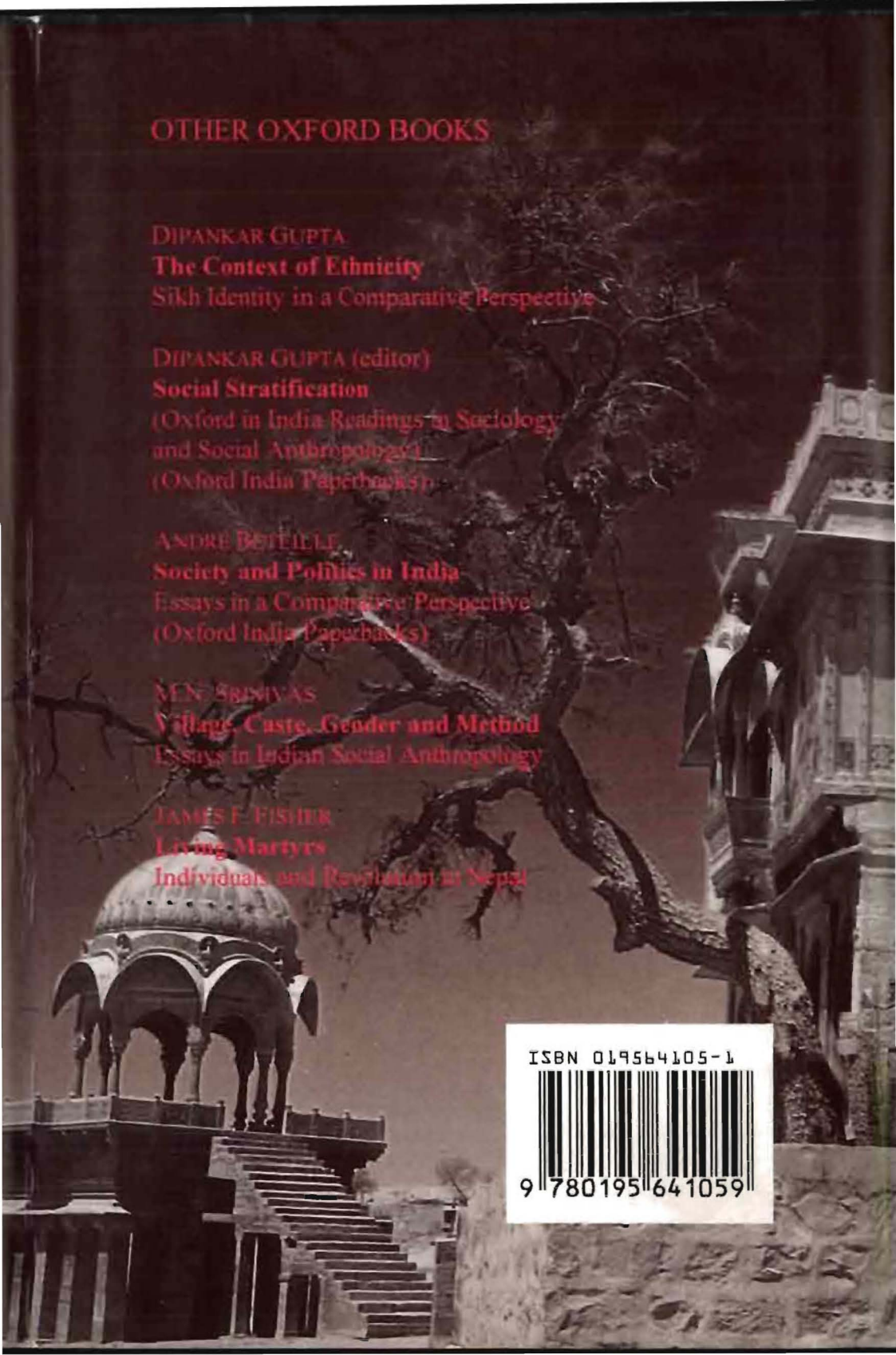

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