



The catastrophe of blazing forests, hills in flame and the failing British during 1916-1921

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Abstract— *One of the fair, straightforward and challenging task before the present academicians is to resurrect for posterity the hidden accounts of injustices done, mass-destruction of resources both natural and human, crimes committed by the colonial masters under the pretext of rules and regulations that were framed only for continued exploitation and the element of protest amongst the colonized people for protection of men and environment. “Acts” of protest lesser known; that may be individual or autonomous have hidden repercussions. The growing control of the colonials over resources and territories affected living traditions and life-styles thereby imposing upon the natives; be it masses or the rulers, a repressive process of acceptance and submission either coercively or persuasively. Denial to conform had its own dangers yet the living consciousness of natives opposed restrictions and absurd demands at every step.*



During 1916-1921, the hills of Kumaon saw incessant fire that would continue for days informed to be caught by accident to the British administration which in reality would be set ablaze by the village people of the hilly regions of Kumaon. The same men/women, who had post-independence, started the Chipko Movement for the protection of forest-wealth used to burn their forests overnight to protest against the Forest Regulation Act imposed by the British. The village women who in the Chipko movement would cling to trees to oppose their vehement destruction would silently watch the whole region burn. This form of silent resistance added to the increasing administrative failures, enormous anxiety, discomfort and apprehensions amidst the Britons.

In this paper, I propose a re-engagement into the Forest Regulations Act as imposed and the active resistance of the hill people who were stereotyped as “simple and law-abiding hillman” as there was an absence of protest in the first century of British rule. A revisionist remaking of the past and re-invention of a new tradition becomes an act of creation. History, as retained in the memories of the people, contains symbolic power. They become the symbolic projections of peoples’ hope, values, fears and aspirations.

Keywords— *Protest, Silent Resistance, Stereotype, Community, Ecology, Landscape, Chipko Movement.*

The British conquest of India was the invasion and destruction of a high civilization by a trading company utterly without scruple or principle, careless of art and greedy of gain, overrunning with fire and sword a country temporarily disordered and helpless, bribing and murdering, annexing and stealing, and beginning that career of illegal and “legal” plunder which has now gone ruthlessly for one hundred and seventy-three years, and goes on at this moment while in our secure comfort we write and read

writes Will Durant in his *The Case for India* that he dedicates to John Haynes Holmes and James T Sunderland calling them as “The Bravest Friends of India in America.” When the eighty hard-headed businessmen met in the city of London to start the East India Company, their concern had been with trade- in spices, silks, gems, camphor and Indigo and not the dominion over lands. Even the first voyages were fitted out not for India at all, but for Sumatra. In 1608, however, the Company’s agents in Bantam and the

Moluccas reported that the people there were good customers for Indian calicoes and suggested that a trading post should be set up in India to buy them.

The Mughal emperor Jahangir gave permission for such a post to be established, and finally- in face of strong opposition from the Portuguese, who had been the first Europeans to arrive in the East- the Company established warehouses at Surat, the chief port in western India, in 1612. After Surat, further 'factories' (as the trading posts were called) were set up at Ahmedabad, Burhanpur, Ajmer and Agra. By 1622 the company had nothing more to fear from the Portuguese, who had suffered a series of defeats at the hands of the English and the Dutch. Unformed, casual but hardly accidental the British empire was constructed with mixed motives and powered by personal and commercial profit. It was ruthless and self-seeking and –from the point of view of the Indian people- it was no better than what had gone before, and no worse than what came after. (P.25) After forging and violating treaties, by playing one native prince against another and by generous bribes given and received, Robert Clive plundered and stood amazed at the wealth the country had referring to which he wrote, "When I think of the marvelous riches of that country, and the comparatively small part which I took away, I am astonished at my own moderation." Such were the morals of the men who proposed to bring civilization to India. The British taxed the provinces under the company so exorbitantly that two-thirds of the population fled, defaulters were confined in cages, and exposed to the burning sun, fathers sold their children to meet the rising rates. It was usual to demand 50% of the net produce of the land. Every effort, lawful or unlawful was made to get the utmost out of the wretched peasantry, who were subjected to torture, in some instances cruel and revolting beyond all description, if they would not or could not yield what was demanded. (P.11)

This dominant, rigid, crude control of colonials exercised their hold in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand over both men and nature. The process of getting materially strong and powerful changed the shape of the landscape of the hilly regions as extreme exploitation of resources started vehemently. Indian teaks were in great demand especially after the depletion of teak forest elsewhere in Europe and played an important role in the maritime expansion during Anglo-French wars. The first colonial forestry service was established in Dutch Indonesia in the 1840's, for the export of teak to Europe. Shortly afterwards, in the 1850's and 1860's, when railways and expanding urban markets led to sudden shortages of marketable hardwoods, the British organized India's Forest Service, but effective reforestation and sustained-yield management of India's hardwood forests came into direct conflict with peasants' traditional

uses of the forested hilly tracts (P.342). In 1800, the East India Company appointed a commission to enquire into the availability of Teak wood. Dietrich Brandis set up the Indian Forest Service in 1864 and helped formulate the Indian Forest Act of 1865 which extended the British colonialism in India and its claim over forests in India.

The 1865 Act was a precursor to the Forest Act of 1878, which truncated the centuries old traditional use by communities of their forests and secured the colonial governments control over the forestry. It simultaneously empowered the British government to declare any land covered with trees as a government forest and make rules to manage it. Over the course of three decades, the forest department took control of nearly half the land in Kumaon, and classified most of it under specific rules and regulations. A polarization happened between the Forest Department and villagers that accelerated the decline of forests. Until then there had been almost no regulation of villagers's access to any forest for grazing, fuelwood, construction timber, and their other needs. In the reserve areas, villagers no longer had "rights" but only "privileges," which could be restricted according to the foresters' assessments of the forest needs. A prolonged debate within the colonial bureaucracy on whether to treat the customary use of the forest as based on "right" or on "privilege" was settled by the selective use of precedent and the principle that "the right to conquest is the strongest of all rights- it is a right against which there is no appeal. (P.27) The foresters were becoming specialists in timber production like their counterparts in Europe and North America. In their determination to control the reserves, they constructed a hierarchy from British Professional foresters down to forest guards recruited from local villages, who became the first police force of any sort in the history of the hills. From their training programs to their uniforms the forestry hierarchy emphasized efficiency, discipline and authority. (P. 344)

By 1907, forest department sought to protect land from fire, as well as to restrict fodder harvests, cattle grazing and lopping. Between 1911 and 1916, the continued creation of forest settlements put an additional 3000 sq. miles of forest in Kumaon under restricted use. Commercial forestry and the changes it brought into its wake tighter regulations and reclassifications- left Kumaoni villagers with less control over forest resources for grazing and collecting fodder. The imposition of Forest management severely dislocated traditional agrarian practices. The villagers of Kumaon soon came to see the Forest Department primarily as a machinery of repression. The landmark in the history of Indian forestry is undoubtedly the building of the railway network. The first task before the new department was to identify the sources of supply of strong and durable timbers – such as Sal, teak and deodar-which could be used as railway sleepers. (P.68)

With the 1878 Act the systematic management of the Kumaon hill forests commenced with the constitution of small blocks of reserved forests to furnish a permanent supply of fuel and timber to the administrative centers of Nainital, Almora and the cantonment town of Ranikhet. Signs of colonial authority such as barracks, the police station, frontiers and their barriers, and hospitals dotted the landscape. The construction of railroads and the draining of the swamps altered the topography which was a sure-sign of domestication and colonization of Nature. (P.74)

The British were as rigid and willful in their dealings with the natives in the hills as well. A combination of knowledge, power and will applied on a large scale worked wider devastations creating a mechanical order which transferred human beings into impersonal instruments of functionality. The colonizers no doubt believed that their success was dependent on the mastery of land and its people. They acted superior, condescending, elegant and they left the natives with subversive choices of survival. The landholders were required to provide several sets of services for all government officials on tour and for white travellers e.g., shikaris and mountaineers. The most common of these involved carrying loads and building chappars (temporary rest huts), the supply of provisions such as milk, food, grass, wood and cooking vessels. Deriving pleasure at the expense/discomfiture of the 'other' becomes the trope of cultural imperialism. In his preface, Nayar is very considerate and quite appreciative of the Britons hard day's work, efficiency and ruthlessness. Thus, seeking pleasure after a days' labour is a necessary precondition of survival in a foreign land which is due to be arranged unconditionally by the ruled. The paradox lies in the fact that bearing pains and hardships they ruled over the land and craved to derive comfort and physical pleasures extending tremendous physical and mental harassments and pain to the ruled. This comfort, pleasure had socio-cultural implications as they were the clear signs of Power and control that they exercised.

Yet, the same officials commented that the hillmen's aversion to work under compulsion had led to an undeserved reputation for indolence. "While he worked hard enough in his fields, coolie labour, especially during the agricultural season, was performed in a manner that made his resentment apparent." (P.74) Travellers and soldiers thus often found themselves stranded when villagers failed to oblige in carrying their luggage. Forest officials touring in the interior of Garhwal were unable to obtain grain, as villagers, even where they had surplus stock, refused to supply to a department they regarded 'as disagreeable interlopers to be thwarted if possible.' By being indifferent to the comfort and convenience of the masters, the natives showed their subversion of their very

presence. Here, as elsewhere in colonial South and South East Asia, unusual exactions and other forms of state encroachment upon the privileges of individuals or communities were regarded as transgressing the traditional relationship between the ruler and the ruled. By clashing with his notions of economic justice, increased state intervention breached the "moral economy" of the peasant. Anticipating that the hillman would react by throwing his forest loads down the khud and some day an unfortunate forest officer may go after them', Wydham, the commissioner of Kumaon believed that the only way to prolong the life of the utar system would be for the forest officials to use pack ponies.(P.76)

Another aspect of colonial forestry was hunting-which was although illegal for tribal and hunting communities, but was very much prevalent among all British officials- from top to bottom; large scale 'shikar' of elephants, tigers, birds among other animals were alarmingly high in numbers ranging from hundreds to thousands. Their control was always coercive and in the imperial rule, the margins submitted to them by default; yet amongst these hills the living consciousness of natives opposed restrictions, demands at every level. The colonial forestry caused irreparable environmental damage and jeopardized the livelihood of communities who subsisted on forests. The intrusion of the colonizers generates terror and fear in the mind of women who are always cautious and attentive reprimanding their men and children. A fear of shortage of food and resources worry them as the colonizers are bent upon cutting down trees.

The British knew that the importance of forests in hill life gave rise to a 'natural system of conservancy' that took different forms. Through religion, folklore and tradition the Khasa communities drew a protective ring around the forests. Often hill tops were dedicated to local deities and the trees around the summit and on the slopes were preserved. (P.30-31). Particularly in Eastern Kumaun and around temples, deodar plantations had become naturalized. Temple groves of deodar varied in extent from a few trees to woods of several hundred acres. As late as 1953, it was reported that the finest strands of deodar, found near temples, were venerated and protected from injury. Making landscapes into a well-defined identifiable ritual space can add an element of sanctity thereby restricting human intervention into it. Traditionally, many villages had fuel reserves even on gaon sanjait (common) land measured by the government, which the villagers cut over in regular rotation by common consent. Chaundkot Pargana in Garhwal was singled out for its forests within village boundaries, called 'banis' where branches and trees were only cut at specified times and with the permission of the entire village community. Cooperation of a high order was

also manifest in the fixed boundaries adhered to by every village-boundaries existing from the time of Indian rulers. Masses can take hold of history by controlling landscapes and building organic relationships based on care and concern. This being not done, masses would be subject to history.

Village sites were usually chosen halfway up the spur, below oak forests and the perennial springs associated with them, and above the cultivated fields along the river bed. In such a situation all crops could be 'raised to perfection', a healthy elevated site was available for houses, and herds of cattle could be comfortably maintained. Until 1910 most villages came close to this ideal. With animal husbandry being an important to their economy as grain cultivation, the hill men and their cattle migrated annually to the grass-rich areas of the forest. Temporary cattle sheds (kharaks) were constructed and the cultivation of small patches carried out. In the permanent hamlets, oak forests provided both fodder and fertilizer. Green and dry leaves, which served the cattle as litter, were mixed with the excreta of the animals and fermented to give manure to the fields. Thus the forest augmented the nutritive value of the fields, through its foliage and indirectly through the excreta of the cattle fed with fodder leaves and forest grass. In the lower hills, the extensive chir forests served for pasture. Every year the dry grass and pine –needle litter in the chir forest was burnt to make room for a fresh crop of luxuriant grass. Simultaneously the needle litter, whose soapy surface endangered the otherwise sure-footed hill cattle, was destroyed. Very resistant to fire, chir was used for building houses and as torchwood. In certain parts where pasture was scarce, trees were grown and preserved for fodder. (P.64)The demarcation of reserved forests gave rise to the speculation that the state would take away other wooded areas from their control, villagers were in certain cases deforesting woodland.

Discontent with the new forest regulations manifested itself in various other ways. Desertion was considered by a group of villagers belonging to Tindarpur patti in Garhwal, who approached an English planter for land 'as the new forest regulations and restrictions were pressing on them so severely that they wished to migrate into another district and climate rather than put up with them any longer. The villagers used to give misleading information at the time of fixation of rights. They were not in a frame of mind to give much voluntary assistance and their active resentment at the fire protection of large areas was manifested as the reserved forests witnessed a number of 'malicious' fires in the year 1916. Although hill peasants occasionally used labour strikes to cripple the administration, burning the forests continued to be their main method of protest. In May the forests in the Gaula range of Nainital division were set

ablaze. The damage reported was exclusively in the Chir forests, and 28,000 trees which were burnt had to be prematurely felled. For the circle as a whole it was estimated that at least 64 percent of the 441 fires which burnt 388 square miles in the preceding year were 'intentional.' Numerous fires broke out simultaneously over large areas, and often the occurrence of a fire was a signal for general 'firing' in the whole neighbourhood. In Nainital and in the old reserves of Airadeo and Binsar of Almora district-res which had been fire protected for many years – an established crop of seedlings was wiped out. In Airadeo the fire continued for three days and two nights, with 'new fires being started time after time directly a counterfiring line was successfully completed.'

Collectively organized breaches of forest law occurred most often at the peak of new restrictions, such that more militant forms of resistance emerged with the onset of forest management. A growing campaign sprung from the same motivations underlying the sporadic protests that took place during the early years of forest administration. During 1916-1921, the hills of Kumaon saw incessant fire ablaze by the same villagers who post-independence adhered to Chipko movement for the protection of their forest wealth. The women who clanged to trees to oppose their vehement destruction silently watched the whole region burn. This form of silent resistance by the natives was incomprehensible to the British.

There were some basic differences in the ideology, objectives, strategy, and nature of leadership of the peasant resistance movements in Tehri state which were called Dhandak and movements in the British Kumaon Commissionary related to forest issues. The activities in Kumaon were protestations against exploitative Alien Rule and they generally gained the momentum in an atmosphere inflamed by the Gandhian National Movement; the educated middle-class leaders spoke out for the movement and they were well-informed critics of colonial economic policies. The Dhandaks (a traditional form of resistance found in Tehri state), on the contrary, were peasants who targeted mainly rapacious local officials, and were devoid of any explicit ideology and program. The Dhandaks were launched and led within the state by the peasant leadership which mobilized the masses primarily around local issues. These traditional forms of protests, however serious or violent, had always subsided on the personal intervention or assurances of the King (P.167)

First of all, peasants refused to comply with imposed rules and the officials who enforced these occasionally, when the demands grew excessive and were backed by force, villagers fled to the jungles or across political frontiers into British territory. Alternatively, they would catch hold of

offending officials, shave his head and moustache, put him on a donkey with his face towards the tail and drive him out of the state. Such non-cooperation at a local level often culminated in a gathering of men drawn from neighbouring villages. “Dhandak” comes from “dand kiye gi,” the admonition used by Garhwali mother’s to hush troublesome children. “The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence,” wrote Fanon in “The Wretched of the Earth” (44). The colonized native, for a long time beaten into the ground, begins to carve out a new Self first in the form of anti-colonial resistance, which takes the form of violence. Thus violence is preceded by a moment of consciousness and awareness where the colonized recognizes his oppression. Once this recognition dawns, then the violent insurrection against the oppressor occurs. The violence of the anti-colonial struggle is ‘instrumental violence’, and is essentially a social project, directed at the community as a whole. (P.84)

Having decided not to cultivate their fields or pay revenue, peasants marched to the capital, accompanied by the beating of drums. Here they demanded an audience with the King and the repeal of the new laws. In the dhandak, physical violence (barring isolated attack on officials) was conspicuous by its absence. Its socio-cultural idiom was predicated firstly on the traditional relationship between Raja and Praja, and secondly on the democratic character of these peasant communities. By protesting in such a manner peasants actually believed that they were helping the King- to whom they accorded a quasi-divine status- restore justice. Once punishment was inflicted thus on erring officials, the dhandak invariably subsided- only to ‘flare’ up again when fresh cases of tyranny occurred. The dhandak essentially represents a right to revolt which is sanctioned by custom. Hindu scriptures urged obedience to the sovereign as well as the right to revolt when the King failed to protect his people. The Dhandak embodied, however, a distinctive form of social protest which continued to be used during the colonial period. (P.84)

An association of local journalists, lawyers and intellectuals chaired in its initial years by Rai Bahadurs professing loyalty to the King Emperor, underwent a rapid transformation with the onset of the forest department and the enhancement of the customary services. In 1916, leaders in the hills of Kumaon established the Kumaon Parishad, with the aim of abolishing forced labour. The opposition to forced labour also coincided with the forest campaign when it took a turn toward greater radicalism in 1921. The impact of village-level protest and indirectly the upsurges elsewhere in India contributed to a growing radicalization of the Parishad best exemplified in the Person of Badri Dutt Pande of Almora. The forest issues were hotly debated among the local educated leaders and reformers such as

Tara Dutt Gairola, Badri Dutt Pandey, Govind Ballabh Pant, Mukundi Lal and Anusuya Prasad Bahuguna. Convinced of the futility of memoranda presented to government by a few individuals based in Almora, Pande and his associates sought to establish branches of the Parishad in the villages of Kumaon. An upsurge in incendiary fires in forests was mirrored by fiercer protests against forced labour. The Garhwal Lawyer and Legislative Council member Taradutt Gairola pleaded for a ‘vigorous policy of reform’, failing which the trouble (would) arise’ at the revision of the revenue settlement. An English Planter based in Kausani reported that while Hargovind Pant, an Almora Lawyer, was asking that coolies should not be supplied for Utar, village leaders were prepared to go even further and opposed the use of all coolies, including Khushkharid coolies. (P.87)

In early January the Conservator of Forests was refused coolies at Dwarahat and Ganai, and anticipating a strike the DC of Almora, W.C.Dible, urgently asked the government for a declaration of its future policy. At Bageshwar a crowd of over ten thousand heard Badridutt pass on a message from Mahatma Gandhi that thousand heard Badridutt pass on a message from Mahatma Gandhi that ‘he would come and save them from oppression as he did in Champaran. When almost everyone responded to a call to raise their hands to show that they would refuse utar, Pande continued: After abolishing coolie utar they would agitate for the forests. He would ask them not to extract resin, or saw sleepers, or take forest contracts. They should give up service as forest guard which involves insulting their sisters and snatching their sickles.

The nature of protest can be gleaned from summary accounts of the court cases. An estimated 246000 acres of forest were burnt in a total of 395 recorded fires. Gangua, aged 16, was one of several youths ‘put up by non-cooperators’ to destroy ‘valuable regeneration areas’ by fire. Nor was participation restricted to men. Durga was sentenced to one month in jail when she deliberately set fire to Thaklori forest. In at least four different instances, witnesses set up by the prosecution were won over by non-cooperators and the cases have to be dropped. Chanar Singh and four other of Tagnia clan of Doba Talla, Katyur were affected by lectures by non-cooperators and a Jogi and set fire to regeneration areas. This tantalizingly brief reference to the Yogi (who was eventually prosecuted) leads one to speculate that the peasantry sought a moral-religious sanction for their acts. No such sanction was required by Padam Singh and Dharam Singh of Katyur, awarded the maximum sentence of seven years rigorous imprisonment, who expressed their opposition to state monopoly in no uncertain terms. Durga, Gangua, Chanar Singh, Padam Singh are the people who by their sheer power of resistance rise to the status of the real makers of history though being

at the receiving end of violence, injustice and humiliation inflicted by the foresters.

In the words of the magistrate: “The compartment fired was near the village and used by them. They resented the work of department in this compartment since it interfered with their use of the compartment. Therefore, they set fire to it deliberately.” In Garhwal region too, the DC had convicted 549 persons, 45 for ‘direct or indirect incendiary’, and 504 for refusing to extinguish fires, before the recommendations of the Grievance Committee led to all pending cases being dropped. Fires were reported to be most acute in the areas bordering Almora, and in the southern patties of Lansdowne subdivision in the outer hills. (P.91)

The protests enjoyed wide popular support, and the administration was unable to detect people involved. James C. Scott makes a very significant contribution by innovating the terms ‘public transcripts’ and ‘hidden transcripts’ in his project of making the feeble voices of the powerless audible. He says, “Public transcripts would be the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate, and hidden transcripts would be the discourse that takes place ‘off-stage,’ beyond direct observation by power holders. Hidden transcripts may be read as a powerful weapon of defiance and resistance of the dominant discourse of power. Scott understands that the hidden transcript is clear-sightedly critical of existing relations of dominations and therefore inevitably comes into conflict with theories of ideology and hegemony. One could interpret hidden transcripts as a subtler strategy of the powerless, to appropriate the dominant agencies of domination, because by avoiding direct confrontation with the dominant discourse, they are able to preserve and accumulate their strength for a more effective resistance.”

Mass discontent also coincided with the return of more than ten thousand Kumaoni soldiers that the British had recruited to serve in World War I. The influx of these trained soldiers with strong ties to the Kumaon villagers pressured the British government even further. There was involvement of soldiers in the forest movement of 1921. In Garhwal, the fires were most often started by soldiers on leave but as ninety-nine percent of the population sympathized with them, their apprehension by the authorities became an impossible task. Four soldiers of the 39th Garhwalis were arrested for threatening or assaulting forest officials. After the Uttarayani mela, ex-soldiers were active among those who helped the Kumaon Parishad form Sabhas in the villages of the Kosi valley. One soldier said in his speeches that Govt was not a Raja, but a bania and Rakshasi Raj and the King emperor was Ravana. Symbols from the Hindu epics were invoked in the Kumaon movement of 1921 for “characterizing the colonial government as evil and

demons. The past, vibrant and alive in the form of religious myths, ideas of good and evil, lends the inhabitants exceptional strength to face life’s miseries and difficulties, with a vitality and forthrightness. But there is a lack of intervention of religious elements in the resistance movements in the princely state of Tehri. The Tehri State movements did not involve priests and Sadhus (ascetics) to seek moral, religious sanctions for their acts as they venerated their King as the living embodiment of God Badrinath. (P.168)

According to Richard Tucker, the first non-cooperation movement under Mahatma Gandhi’s leadership brought modern political conflict to the hills for the first time. Thus, in Kumaon, previously untouched by nationalist politics, several towns witnessed protest meetings between Jan-March 1921 and ‘young congress leaders were urging the population to resist that they called the abrupt and arbitrary new regulations. In this incendiary atmosphere, the hills were suddenly in flames, and the Sal forests were ‘ablaze across the Sivalik hills even into Punjab.’ As Congressmen were appalled at the damage the blazes were evidently a tragic example of ‘spontaneous peasant protest’. By insisting that it was “Forest Department’s Work” which was destroyed almost overnight by the fires of 1921, Wyndham obscures the customary and consensual use of the forests by the village communities before 1911. (P.94). Forest administration introduced a notion of property- one integral to colonial rule but previously foreign to Kumaon –which ran contrary to the experience of the Khasa village communities where different jatis lived together in ‘remarkable amity’, symbolized by their sharing of the common hookah. (P.20)

In the cultural memory of the hills, British colonialism was a violent phenomenon and process affecting every aspect of the day-to-day life of the colonized people which had begun by a reorganization of their land that belonged to them inadvertently for generations. The demarcation had made them alienated and away from their land and its upkeep. The Coolie and Begar system added further distortion when efforts were made to turn people into “objects” which was successfully countered and absolved by the villagers. Traditionally, peasant protest in the pre-British period had taken the form of collective resistance to tyranny by officials, and concomitantly, a call to the monarch to restore justice. Established in the afterglow of the coronation Durbar of 1911, the Kumaon Parishad initially swore undying loyalty to ‘George Pantham’ but the pressure from below, as it were, egged them, and most noticeably Badridutt Pande, to adopt a more directly confrontationist position. Such a situation had been brought about by the ‘inherent elements of folk and popular ideology and the ‘primitive rebellion’ at least in this instance, proved to be

several steps ahead of 'modern nationalism.' (P.96) In the eyes of the so-called 'nationalist' school, the peasant was drawn into the orbit of modern politics by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi; thus, nationalism helped to arouse the peasant and awaken him to his own needs, demand and above all the possibility of any active role in societal and political development. However, it is for certain that numerous peasant and tribal revolt occurred well before 'modern' nationalism' had penetrated into the countryside. The cohesion and the collective spirit of the village community provided the mainspring of political action. The wide-ranging campaign of 1921, though different from a modern social movement in its aim and methods, was far from being a spontaneous outburst of an illiterate peasantry. Expressed through the medium of popular protest were conflicting theories of societal relationships that virtually amounted to two world-views. The processes of acculturation, assimilation, social interactions operational in the form of authority and servitude in colonial India encompassed tremors, disturbances, conflicts and tensions that affected the social fabric severely. Some of them are on record in the form of historical documents and memoirs while the subaltern sensitivities are either overlooked or are off the historical records.

The Resolution of the English Parliament, printed in the Journal of the House of Commons 48(1793) states that: "It is the peculiar and bounden duty of the legislature to promote, by all just and prudent means, the interests and happiness of the inhabitants of India. (Days of the Raj, p.227) If building roads, railways, churches, post-offices, clubs, introducing reforms through missionaries and western education was the right course towards happiness, they definitely tried to make the natives happy. They ushered in massive changes in the economic, cultural and administrative realms. The condescending Sahibs believed themselves to be the administrators working for the improvement of the natives. "The Sahibs believed in their 'ma-baap' role, where the Englishman was in the role of the parent to the child-like native." (Days of the Raj, p.212) The instances of social interactions between the masters and natives, the difference that they observed in dealings, the stoicism and indifference can compel a new-humanist to raise questions about the extremities of happiness or pleasure that they pursued. The general gaps of dissensions, condescension and silent resistance open-up in the histories and memoirs as an oral bruise over which the tongue moves unconsciously. In "Shaping the Past", Arthur R.M. Lower discusses how a great deal of (human) intellectual effort is directed to bringing some kind of order out of the chaos of our memories... and organizing their knowledge into patterns."

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