

VISIONS OF PEASANT RULE
AGRARIAN POPULISM IN INDIA, c.1920-80



Benjamin Miles Graham
Nuffield College
University of Oxford

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History
Michaelmas Term 2025
Word count: 100,000

Short Abstract

This thesis explores a neglected 'agrarian populist' ideological tradition in India through four figures: Sir Chhotu Ram, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, N. G. Ranga and Charan Singh. Well studied within their respective regions - Haryana, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh - historians have largely overlooked the political influence of their ideologies in India, particularly after independence in 1947. Their 'agrarian populisms', rooted in a notion of the 'people' (peasantry) defined against various urban 'elites', led them to advocate for land reform, cooperatives and parliamentary democracy. However, their thought was not completely identical as each politician took independent stances on each policy in accordance with their own unique experiences and intellectual interests. Nevertheless, the thesis seeks to understand why 'agrarian populist' ideology first emerged in India in the 1920s, and how what was initially a marginal creed came to exert significant influence in post-colonial Indian politics.

Taking a political and intellectual history approach, this study proposes an alternative ideological framework for understanding each figure's ideology, as well as a new approach to studying twentieth-century Indian agrarian politics. Rather than focusing on the worldviews of 'subaltern' groups or the more prominent national figures of M. K. Gandhi (1869-1948) and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), this thesis examines the writings and political careers of figures who, while not peasants themselves, wielded enormous influence on peasant politics. Their ideas also clearly resonated with rural populations, as evidenced by the substantial support their parties and movements received in the countryside.

Overall, this thesis intends to show that the origins of 'agrarian populist' thinking run much deeper than previously suggested in the historiography. Appreciating these deep roots of 'agrarian populist' thought suggests that 'populism' of one kind, or another, has been an important feature of Indian politics for at least a century.

Long Abstract

In the 1980s, the Subaltern Studies Collective made the peasantry central to Indian historiography, highlighting marginalised voices in narratives of nationalism and development. Interest in Indian peasant studies, however, declined sharply in the 1990s, leaving a gap in our understanding of Indian agrarian politics. Although recent historiography shows renewed attention to agrarian questions, sustained study of the interplay between political ideas, party politics, and peasant movements in twentieth-century India remains limited.

The present thesis attempts to address this lacuna through an examination of four pivotal figures who shaped twentieth-century Indian agrarian politics. These individuals - Sir Chhotu Ram, the Jat lawyer and co-founder of the agrarian Unionist Party which dominated Punjabi politics from 1923-46; Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the Hindu ascetic and leader of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (Peasant Society), the largest peasant movement in late colonial India; N. G. Ranga, the Kamma academic and founding President of the Swatantra (Freedom) Party, the largest opposition party in India by the 1967 elections; and Charan Singh, the Jat lawyer who rose to become Prime Minister of India - represent diverse regional, ideological and temporal perspectives within Indian agrarian politics. Although not working peasants, they came from rural backgrounds and devoted their careers to representing peasant interests. Their writings on rural society and politics are invaluable, given the scarcity of records by peasants themselves.

To analyse the political ideologies of these four figures, the thesis follows Canovan in defining 'agrarian populism' as a form of 'rural radicalism', which pitches the 'people' (peasantry) against urban 'elites', rooted in a 'peasant' (primarily subsistence producer) or 'farmer' (primarily market producer) base. Furthermore, it also deploys Canovan's tripartite typology of 'agrarian populism'. The first type, 'the populism of farmers', is exemplified by movements such as U. S. Populism, particularly the People's Party that flourished between 1892 and 1909. The second type, 'the populism of the intelligentsia', finds its classic expression in Russian Populism, particularly the Narodniks (Populists) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The third type, 'peasants'

populism', is represented by 1920s Eastern European parties such as the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, which governed Bulgaria from 1919 to 1923.

Of these three categories, this thesis finds that the Indian 'agrarian populism' of Chhotu Ram, Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh most closely aligns with Canovan's third type - given their shared emphasis on comprehensive land reform designed to populate the countryside with as many small peasant proprietors as possible, the development of agricultural cooperatives primarily in services (credit, marketing) rather than in production (cooperative farms) to protect small peasant proprietor interests and link them together as the basis for a prosperous rural economy plus their commitment to parliamentary democracy as the key means for pursuing these goals and making democracy in India safe by giving it a firm anchoring in land proprietorship at the grassroots. However, the thesis also argues for three additional distinctive features of 'agrarian populist' ideology in India, namely its entanglements with imperial ideology (which I term 'imperial populism'), Gandhian ideas and Hindu jurisprudential thought.

On the first, the emergence of a distinctive 'imperial populism' can be traced most clearly through the trajectory of the Unionist Party in Punjab, which Chhotu Ram helped establish in 1923. The Unionist Party emerged from British strategies to stabilise the countryside, rooted in the Punjab Land Alienation Act (LAA) (1900), which restricted land transfers between caste-defined groups and later shaped legislative eligibility under the Government of India Act, 1919. Led by Chhotu Ram and other landed Muslim and Sikh politicians, the party defended the Act as its 'Magna Carta' and pursued agrarian reform within imperial structures, reflecting an 'agrarian populism' compatible with colonial rule - distinct from the confrontational 'agrarian populisms' of Canovan's first two types in particular.

On the second, the influence of Gandhian ideology can be seen in Swami Sahajanand Saraswati's intellectual development, whose initial political awakening was deeply shaped by the Mahatma's philosophy of non-violent resistance and *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) in 1920. However, by 1934, Sahajanand had grown increasingly disillusioned with Gandhi's consensual approach to

resolving conflicts between peasants and the aristocratic landlord class that formed a crucial pillar of British colonial rule in Bihar. This ideological rupture led Sahajanand towards the socialist left and eventually towards Communist policies and rhetoric, reflecting his growing conviction that more radical measures were necessary to achieve meaningful agrarian transformation. Nevertheless, while Sahajanand ultimately advocated for the abolition of aristocratic landlordism without compensation, Gandhian thinking continued to inform his writings on this subject as late as the second half of the 1940s.

Furthermore, both Ranga and Singh, despite ultimately significantly diverging from the Gandhian vision as, unlike the latter's emphasis on communal cooperation and material simplicity to be pursued in a village-centred utopia of a network of rural republics without a strong state, they emerged as vigorous champions of individual peasant proprietary rights, groups whom Sahajanand and Chhotu Ram had acted on behalf of too. Thus, their ultimate political objective was far less communalistic in character than Gandhi's, although they still drew considerable inspiration from him and frequently invoked his authority to legitimise their developmental ideas.

On the third, indigenous intellectual cultures shaped the articulation of 'agrarian populist' ideology in India. All four figures examined in this study - Chhotu Ram, Sahajanand, Ranga, and Singh - drew on texts from the Hindu canon to support their political positions, particularly to justify the claims of their respective communities to practise agriculture as a legitimate and/or sacred occupation. The primary text deployed for this purpose was the *Manusmriti* (Law Code of Manu), which occupies a central position within the broader *dharmashastra* tradition of Sanskritic jurisprudence in Hinduism. This ancient legal compilation provided these modern politicians with scriptural authority for their contemporary political arguments. Chhotu Ram, Sahajanand, Ranga, and Singh all appealed to this textual tradition to assert that the rights of small peasants to own and cultivate land were not merely politically expedient but were deeply embedded within the sacred traditions of ancient India. By grounding their arguments in religious authority, they

implied that these rights should be respected and protected in both present and future political arrangements.

The introduction reviews five main approaches deployed to study agrarian politics in India since the 1960s: the Marxist 'Middle Peasant Thesis', the 'Cambridge School of Indian History', the 'Moral Economy of the Peasant', 'Subaltern Studies' and 'Oral History'. Taking an approach that attempts to combine the interest of 'Subaltern Studies' authors in agrarian ideas and more recent 'intellectual history' approaches in the Indian historiography, it argues that an examination of the careers of Chhotu Ram and Sahajanand reveals that 'agrarian populist' ideals have been used much earlier in Indian politics than existing scholarly literature has suggested. Most current scholarship dates the emergence of this ideological tradition to the 1960s and 1970s with Charan Singh's rise to national political prominence, or to the 1980s with the emergence of extra-parliamentary 'New Farmers' Movements' which played an important role, particularly in North India, in bringing down Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's government in 1989. By tracing these ideas back to the 1920s and 1930s, we can therefore develop an analytical framework that looks beyond Gandhian ideals for understanding the rise of peasant consciousness in Indian political discourse.

Furthermore, the chapters examining Ranga and Singh demonstrate that 'agrarian populist' ideals continued to exert powerful influence during the Nehruvian period (1947-1964), which scholars have not typically characterised as being particularly 'populist' given that era's emphasis on economic management by technocratic experts. Thus, the introduction suggests that Indian 'agrarian populism' dates to early 20th-century colonial India, predating Charan Singh and the 'New Farmers' Movements' of the 1980s and 1990s.

The first chapter examines Chhotu Ram's political career within the specific context of British Punjab's political landscape during the crucial period from approximately 1920 to 1934. In contrast to existing scholarly interpretations that have variously classified Chhotu Ram's ideology as representing forms of 'liberalism', 'socialism', 'conservatism', 'neo-populism' or simply

‘peasant politics’, this chapter argues that Chhotu Ram should be recognised as the first major exponent of a distinctly ‘agrarian populist’ ideology in India. This ideology, which defined the ‘people’ (peasant) as a small proprietor or tenant with statutory rights under the LAA against the urban, exploitative *bania* (money lender) was characterised by three fundamental commitments: comprehensive land reform designed to protect peasant cultivators from exploitation by money lenders, the development of agricultural cooperatives to provide credit, marketing, and technological support to small farmers, and a firm commitment to parliamentary democracy, albeit of a limited kind conducted through a system of power sharing with the British Raj, as the preferred mechanism for achieving these reforms.

Perhaps the most striking symbol of Chhotu Ram’s ‘agrarian populist’ vision was his call for the establishment of ‘*zamindar raj*’ (peasant rule) throughout the Punjab region. Indeed, the chapter demonstrates that Chhotu Ram’s ‘agrarian populist’ ideology was strongly influenced by what I have termed the ‘imperial populism’ of the British Raj. However, it was only able to exert genuine political impact when the imperial system came under severe strain due to the economic crisis that began with the spread of the Great Depression to Punjab in late-1929. In this context of economic emergency, Ram skilfully synthesised his interests in land reform, cooperatives, and parliamentary democracy through a single piece of transformative legislation: the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act of 1934. This landmark Act was designed to provide immediate relief to indebted peasants who had fallen on hard times due to plummeting crop prices induced by the global economic crisis. More importantly, it significantly restructured Punjab’s land system and paved the way for significant expansion of the province’s cooperative movement, particularly in the areas of agricultural marketing and rural credit provision. These reforms were intended to prevent Punjabi peasants from falling into debt when normal economic conditions returned, thereby creating a more stable and prosperous rural economy.

The second chapter focuses on the ideological development and political career of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, challenging the dominant historiographical narrative that traces a linear

progression from ‘Gandhism’ to ‘Communism’ in his political evolution. Instead, the chapter argues that Sahajanand’s ideological thought, most clearly expressed through his appeals for the establishment of ‘*kisan mazdoor raj*’ (peasant and worker rule), which sought to champion the interests of agricultural labourers, tenant farmers and even small peasant proprietors in opposition to the power of Bihari *zamindars* (aristocratic landlords), can be more precisely understood as representing a relatively radical form of ‘agrarian populism’. This interpretation is supported by Sahajanand’s consistent interest in land reform and cooperative development, as well as his intention for his independent All-India United Kisan Sabha party to participate in parliamentary elections in India following his death. While acknowledging that his ideology was significantly more radical than Chhotu Ram’s, at least rhetorically and especially in its willingness to incorporate Marxist analytical concepts and Communist policy proposals regarding collective and cooperative farming, although in an ultimately inconsistent manner, the chapter suggests a new understanding of Sahajanand as an ‘agrarian populist’ rather than orthodox Marxist-Leninist.

The third chapter investigates the ‘agrarian populist’ ideology of N. G. Ranga, who had been Sahajanand’s close colleague in establishing the All-India Kisan Sabha in 1936. Focusing particularly on Ranga’s political career after Indian independence during the period from approximately 1950 to 1964, the chapter reconstructs his conception of ‘democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*’ (peasant’s and working people’s rule) within the context of contemporary debates about economic planning and development strategy in 1950s India. Like both Ram and Sahajanand, Ranga’s ‘agrarian populism’, which championed the rights of landed and landless peasants against a new ‘elite’ of planning officials after independence, was fundamentally expressed through his commitment to specific types of land reform, cooperatives, and parliamentary democracy.

However, when compared to Sahajanand’s relatively more radical vision, Ranga’s ideology proved more ‘conservative’, particularly in its strong rejection of Congress Party proposals to introduce extensive cooperative farming arrangements in India, although he supported

cooperatives in services like credit as Ram had proposed, as promoted by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Ranga's general opposition to these collectivist policies was articulated partly through appeals to the distinctly Indian ideal of *dharmā*, which he argued supported individual property rights rather than collective ownership. But despite his decision to join the right-wing Swatantra Party in 1959, the chapter does not simply identify Ranga's ideology with political conservatism, instead questioning traditional categorisations of the Swatantra Party itself as purely 'conservative.'

The fourth chapter examines the political career of Charan Singh, who became Prime Minister of India in 1979 after defeating Indira Gandhi and her Congress Party as a leading figure in the opposition Janata (People's) Party coalition during the 1977 elections. The analysis particularly emphasises the period after 1964 in Singh's career, which witnessed his growing disillusionment with the Uttar Pradesh Congress organisation, ultimately leading to his resignation from the party in 1967 following poor electoral performance. The chapter traces Singh's subsequent establishment of the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (Indian Revolution Party) and Bharatiya Lok Dal (Indian People's Party), which eventually became key constituents of the opposition groups united in the Janata Party.

While reconstructing this political history, the chapter challenges existing scholarly arguments that link Charan Singh's ideology to Russian Neo-Populism or U. S. Populism. By contrast, the chapter argues that Charan Singh was the most successful proponent of 'agrarian populist' ideas in India. His version of this tradition involved a more explicit support of mainly landed peasant interests, but also many small peasants and some landless peasants. He opposed India's development model, which he felt favoured exploitative urban commercial and consumer interests. This success came despite Singh's decision to express his 'agrarian populist' vision through the ideal of individual peasant proprietorship rather than through the power of *zamindars* (Punjabi landholders) advocated by Ram or the *kisan* and *mazdoor* unity emphasised by Sahajanand and Ranga. His political success resulted from several factors, most importantly his

strategic decision to abandon the Congress Party at precisely the right moment, when the party began losing its grip on national politics during the critical 1967 elections, and his political base in Uttar Pradesh, which remains one of the most electorally significant states in Indian politics.

The conclusion addresses a critical question: how does studying Indian 'agrarian populism' enhance our understanding of Indian politics generally? The conclusion builds on the argument made in the introduction concerning the deeper than usually acknowledged roots of 'agrarian populist' ideology in India to suggest that the varied deployment of 'agrarian populist' ideas by our four figures provides important context for understanding the rise of other forms of non-agrarian, 'populist' politics in India, which, especially those kinds based on religion (especially Hindu identity) and language (particularly the Telugu language), absorbed and expanded upon earlier 'populisms' which were rooted in an 'agrarian' or 'peasant' identity. Thus, it suggests that 'agrarian populism' has been an important feature of Indian politics since the 1920s and one that remains important and resilient, despite being considerably transformed from the 1980s onwards, in recent Indian politics too.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Maria Misra, for her guidance in framing this research project, her thoughtful feedback on my chapters and for introducing me in the first instance to the study of Indian political and intellectual history via her undergraduate 'Special Subject' paper, 'From Gandhi to the Green Revolution: India, Independence and Modernity, 1947-73', back in late-2018.

I must also acknowledge Professor David Washbrook (1948-2021) and Professor Rosalind (Polly) O'Hanlon for supervising my MPhil thesis on the Swatantra (Freedom) Party, c.1947-64, some of the material from which was revised, expanded and deployed in chapter 3 of this thesis. More recently too, I am grateful to Professor Faisal Devji and Dr Faridah Zaman for their insightful suggestions during my Transfer of Status and Confirmation of Status assessments, which opened new avenues for my research.

On financial matters, I extend my sincere appreciation to the Clarendon Fund and Nuffield College for funding my DPhil, and to Meenakshi Khanna, Sabrina Dax and Bela for their generous hospitality during my research trip to Delhi in November 2024, which was also supported by Nuffield College.

While in India, I was fortunate to meet Professor Prajapati Trivedi who introduced me to Vandana Ghadiali; and Dr Jaya Ojha, who introduced me to Harsh Singh Lohit, both of whom kindly shared their recollections and insights about their grandfather, the former Prime Minister of India Charan Singh (1902-87).

My thanks also go to the dedicated staff of the Bodleian Library, British Library, National Archives of India, Prime Ministers Museum and Library and Nassdoc Library for their assistance in locating obscure archival and secondary materials essential to this thesis.

Nandini Gupta, Dhruv Sood, and Karthik Narayan A. S., meanwhile, provided valuable clarification on the nuances of Indian politics and development strategy, both historical and contemporary. Professor Imre Bangha and Babita Craig offered essential assistance with some

challenging Sanskritic and idiomatic Hindi passages that eventually found their way into Chapter 2 of what follows.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my great-uncle Jim Graham (d. 2020), himself a *kisan* (farmer) of County Monaghan, Ireland, who left me funds that also supported my DPhil studies, my parents and my brother Callum Graham for patiently tolerating my various thesis-related ramblings as the work progressed and Coolie, whose track ‘Kisan’ (ft. Jaz Dhami, JAY1, Temz, Tana, J Fado) (2021), though other tunes are available, provided the soundtrack to countless hours of writing and may have subconsciously inspired this entire endeavour.

Contents

Short Abstract - ii

Long Abstract – iii

Acknowledgements - xi

Introduction - 1

Chapter 1: ‘*Zamindar Raj*’ (Peasant Rule): Sir Chhotu Ram (1881-1945) and the Dawn of Agrarian Populism in Colonial India, c.1920-34 - 22

Chapter 2: ‘*Kisan Mazdoor Raj*’ (Peasant and Worker Rule): Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (1889-1950) and the Radicalisation of Agrarian Populism in Late Colonial India, c.1934-50 - 86

Chapter 3: ‘Democratic *Kisan Mazdoor Praja Raj*’ (Peasant’s and Working People’s Rule): N. G. Ranga (1900-1995) and the Reconfiguration of Agrarian Populism in Nehruvian India, c.1950-64 - 143

Chapter 4: ‘Peasant Proprietorship: The Only Remedy’: Charan Singh (1902-87) and the Impact of Agrarian Populism in Post-Nehruvian India, c.1964-80 - 207

Conclusion – 273

Bibliography - 283

Introduction

This thesis examines the political and intellectual history of what I call ‘agrarian populism’ in India, c.1920-1980 - an ideology rooted in two key ideas of the ‘people’ vs the ‘elite’, several additional elements including ‘imperial populism’, Gandhism plus Hindu jurisprudential thought, which was expressed through specific stances on land reform, cooperatives and democracy. It focuses on four key individuals: Sir Chhotu Ram (1881-1945), Jat lawyer and Unionist Party co-founder; Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (1889-1950), Hindu ascetic and Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha¹ leader; N. G. Ranga (1900-1995), Kamma academic and founding Swatantra² Party president; and Charan Singh (1902-1987), Jat lawyer and former Prime Minister of India.

The thesis argues that these figures articulated ‘agrarian populist’ ideals, defining peasant interests against urban ‘elites’, resembling Eastern Europe’s ‘Green Rising’ of the 1920s, which promoted small peasant proprietorship, service cooperatives and ‘agrarian’ democracy. Indian ‘agrarian populism’ also drew on distinctive influences, including British ‘imperial populism’, Gandhian thought and Hindu jurisprudence. The thesis, therefore, offers an alternative framework for understanding Indian agrarian politics (c.1920-1980), looking beyond national leaders such as M. K. Gandhi (1869-1948) and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964).

In the literature, there are five key approaches to the study of twentieth century Indian agrarian politics: the ‘Middle Peasant Thesis’, the ‘Cambridge School of Indian History’, the ‘Moral Economy of the Peasant’, ‘Subaltern Studies’ and ‘Oral History’. The first, a Marxist theory developed by Alavi and Wolf, argues that agricultural capitalism stratifies the peasantry into rich, middle and poor classes. Middle peasants, those who own and work their land, possess the tactical mobility and freedom to rebel, while rich peasants favour the status quo and poor peasants remain controlled by their employers.³

¹ Bihar Provincial Peasant Society.

² Freedom.

³ Hamza Alavi, ‘Peasants and Revolution’, *Socialist Register*, 2 (1965), 241-277; Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1969), 276-302.

A highly influential argument, the 'Middle Peasant Thesis' led Stokes to assert in 1976 that 'so powerfully has this theoretical analysis carried conviction that historians fall over themselves to discover the radical middle peasant at the centre of disturbance'.⁴ In line with Alavi and Wolf, Stoddart argued that the 1932 Civil Disobedience campaigns in coastal Andhra,⁵ following Gandhi's 1930 salt *satyagraha*,⁶ mainly involved middle peasants affected by the global economic depression after 1929.⁷ Also, Harcourt used their framework to identify 'autonomous small holder peasants' as the main force behind rural rebellions in eastern United Provinces and Bihar during Gandhi's 1942 'Quit India' movement that demanded British withdrawal.⁸

Other scholars, however, have criticised the 'Middle Peasant Thesis,' highlighting cases like the Communist-led Telangana Rebellions (1946-1952) where poor peasants led uprisings against the Hyderabad princely state in South India and later the Government of India.⁹ Also, Mencher pointed out that poor peasants occasionally hired labour in Chingleput,¹⁰ which can make straightforward class stratification there difficult.¹¹ For Western India, Charlesworth emphasised unity among peasant groups due to a lack of commercialisation.¹² Similarly, Hardiman adopted a caste framework to account for 'rich' and 'middle' peasant collaboration during Congress campaigns.¹³

These problems ultimately stem from the fact that the 'Middle Peasant Thesis' was originally intended to explain peasant revolutions in Russia, China, Mexico, Algeria, Vietnam, and Cuba.¹⁴ Also, while the role of ideology, especially 'cultural conservatism', in 'middle peasant' agitation is

⁴ Eric Stokes, 'The Return of the Peasant to South Asian History', *South Asia*, 6, 1 (1976), 106.

⁵ Now in Andhra Pradesh.

⁶ Non-violent resistance.

⁷ Brian Stoddart, 'The Structure of Congress Politics in Coastal Andhra', in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj* (London, 1977), 123, 131n65.

⁸ Max Harcourt, 'Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India', in Low, *Congress*, 325-6.

⁹ D. N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India* (New Delhi, 1983), 10-12, 180-212, esp. 201-2.

¹⁰ In Tamil Nadu.

¹¹ Joan P. Mencher, 'Problems in Analysing Rural Class Structure', *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, 9, 35 (1974), 1499.

¹² Neil Charlesworth, *Peasants and Imperial Rule* (Cambridge, 1985), 268-291.

¹³ David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat* (New Delhi, 1981), 243-55.

¹⁴ Alavi, 'Revolution', 245-62; cf. Wolf, *Wars*, 3-273.

acknowledged by Wolf,¹⁵ the overall theory is essentially an economic account of peasant politicisation. This is underlined by Alavi's view that important Indian peasant movements, like the All-India Kisan Sabha¹⁶ (AIKS), essentially represented 'rich' and 'middle' peasant interests.¹⁷

An even more resolutely anti-idealist approach to agrarian politics was provided in the 1970s by the 'Cambridge School of Indian History'.¹⁸ These authors, echoing earlier work by anthropologists and political scientists of India, saw politics as factional competition like a game or sport, dominated by elite leaders with shared interests, who used ideology rhetorically but sought personal power rather than true reform.¹⁹

Typical of the 'Cambridge School' approach was Washbrook's assertion that that politics is fundamentally about achieving power as 'no policy or programme can be implemented until power is held'.²⁰ Consequently, agrarian politics is explained largely in terms of 'rural local bosses', defined as the 'rich peasants' of Madras Presidency (1684-1937)'s 'dry districts', i.e., 'southern Andhra and hinterland Tamilnad' where agriculture was conducted without reliable irrigation resources, who had grown wealthy from rising grain prices and high demand for cash crops between 1880 and 1920, pressuring rural governments for commercial advantages.²¹

Baker, moreover, argues that Ranga's rise came from elite rivalry - he led anti-*zamindar*²² campaigns in the 1930s to boost fellow Kamma caste member B. Munuswamy Naidu (1885-1935)'s political career, who had lost Velama *zamindar* backing. Naidu needed Ranga's popular support to pursue the Madras Presidency Chief Ministership, which Ranga used to enter Congress.²³ These arguments paint agrarian politics as elitist and strategic, which prompted

¹⁵ Wolf, *Wars*, 292.

¹⁶ All-India Peasant Society.

¹⁷ Alavi, 'Revolution', 263.

¹⁸ Howard Spodek, 'Pluralist Politics in British India', *The American Historical Review* (AHR), 84, 4 (1979), 688-707.

¹⁹ David Hardiman, 'The Indian "Faction"', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies (SS) I* (New Delhi, 1982), 198-231.

²⁰ David Washbrook, 'Introduction', in Christopher John Baker and idem (eds.), *South India* (New Delhi, 1975), 2.

²¹ Idem, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics* (Cambridge, 1976), 11, 18-19, 77, 84ff.

²² Aristocratic landlord.

²³ Christopher John Baker, *The Politics of South India* (Cambridge, 1976), 201, 207-13 and *passim*.

nationalist historians like Gopal to critique Baker and Washbrook for stripping politics of ideology.²⁴

Contemporary to Washbrook's and Baker's scholarship is the 'Moral Economy' approach of Scott. Drawing on Thompson's investigation of food riots in eighteenth century England,²⁵ Scott argues that Southeast Asian peasant rebellions in the 1930s arose from colonial and capitalist threats to their 'moral economy' - namely, the right to subsistence (preventing starvation) and reciprocity (wealthy assistance to the poor during hardship).²⁶ Scott's focus on peasant rebellion suits India better than the 'Middle Peasant Thesis', since India saw rebellions, not revolution, under colonial rule.²⁷ Furthermore, there were also many 'subsistence crises' (i.e. famines) during the colonial period.²⁸ Finally, the 'Moral Economy' approach includes ordinary peasants and shared values, unlike the neglectful 'Cambridge School' perspective.

It is regrettable, therefore, to note that when the 'Moral Economy' approach has been applied to India by historians, the reception has been very critical.²⁹ Although Hardiman links famine, poor harvests, and plague in Western India to the rise of peasant politics in Gujarat, notably before the Gandhi-led 1917 Kheda *satyagraha*,³⁰ he rejected the 'Moral Economy' view in favour of a deeper, regional economic crisis to explain early rural support for Gandhi.³¹ In Eastern India, Greenough argues that Bengali peasants' 'moral economy' was based on prosperity and abundance, not subsistence or reciprocity, explaining their passive, fatalistic response to the 1943 Bengal Famine.³² But above all, for the political historian interested in political ideas and

²⁴ Sarvepalli Gopal, 'Book Reviews', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* (IESHR), 14, 3 (1977), 405.

²⁵ E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136.

²⁶ James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven and London, 1976), 114-56, 176-92.

²⁷ I. J. Catanach, 'Agrarian Disturbances in Nineteenth Century India', *IESHR*, 3, 1 (1966), 65-84.

²⁸ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (London, 2001).

²⁹ Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, 'Premchand and the Moral Economy of Peasantry in Colonial North India', *Modern Asian Studies* (MAS), 45, 5 (2011), 1237n41.

³⁰ Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, 86-113, 248.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 249; idem, 'The Crisis of the Lesser Patidars', in Low, *Congress*, 47-75.

³² Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal* (New York and Oxford, 1982), 261-72.

ideologies, the real problem with the 'Moral Economy' approach, like the class and factional views, is that it remains a highly materialist account of agrarian politics.³³

The fourth historiographical school, and the first to take peasant ideas seriously, is the Guha-led *Subaltern Studies* project. Subaltern authors were generally critical of Marxist and 'Cambridge School' historiographies for their 'elitism'.³⁴ But some space was found for Scott's and Thompson's 'moral economy'.³⁵ The writings of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), meanwhile, provided the concept of 'subaltern',³⁶ which Guha subsequently defined as the '*demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'*',³⁷ which included the peasantry among other groups. Consequently, in stark contrast to the Marxist 'Middle Peasant Thesis', the Subaltern school rejected internal class differentiation within the peasantry. This essentialisation enabled the peasantry to be given a unified voice, leading Guha to foreground the peasant rebel and his 'awareness of his own world and his will to change it'.³⁸

An accompanying argument made by several Subaltern scholars, moreover, is that Congress leaders, especially Gandhi, deradicalised peasant activists, who interpreted *swaraj*³⁹ in millenarian terms in keeping with local religious cultures. For example, in Awadh⁴⁰ c.1919-22, Pandey shows how peasant leaders used Hindu religious symbols like Rama and Sita to inspire resistance and spread hopes of divine aid in easing rents and improving harvests.⁴¹ Alternatively, Amin focused on how peasants inflamed Gandhian *satyagraha*, as seen in the 1922 Chauri Chaura incident

³³ William James Booth, 'A Note on the Idea of the Moral Economy', *American Political Science Review* (APSR), 87, 4 (1993), 951.

³⁴ Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in idem, *SS I*, 1-8; idem, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in idem (ed.), *SS II* (New Delhi, 1983), 28-42; Hardiman, 'Faction', 198-200ff; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *SS IV* (New Delhi, 1985), 341-2ff.

³⁵ David Hardiman, 'The Bhils and Shahukars of Eastern Gujarat', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *SS V* (New Delhi, 1987), 44-50.

³⁶ Antonio Gramsci, 'Notes on Italian History', in Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* [1929-35] (London, 1971), 52-120. 'Subaltern' here means subordinated class. Cf. Ranajit Guha 'Preface' in idem, *SS I*, vii-viii.

³⁷ Guha, 'Historiography', 8. Emphasis original.

³⁸ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1983), 11.

³⁹ Independence.

⁴⁰ Now in Uttar Pradesh.

⁴¹ Gyan Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism', in Guha, *SS I*, 169-70.

where twenty-two British police officers were massacred by peasant protestors, leading Gandhi to suspend nationalist campaigning.⁴²

Many critiques have been made of the Subaltern approach.⁴³ However, one important problem is the paucity of subaltern writing, and the difficulty in finding sources for a subaltern world view. Pandey and Amin, for example, used colonial records and vernacular newspapers, among other documents, as sources.⁴⁴ But that was heavily criticised by several scholars who argued that these could not capture peasant/subaltern thought and that these sources were unrepresentatively focused on acts of violence and rebellion.⁴⁵ Thus, the Subalternists increasingly gave up on studying peasants,⁴⁶ reorienting their work towards nationalist and other 'elite' authors for whom sources are easier to find.⁴⁷

Following the Subaltern school's emergence, 'Oral History' approaches have been applied to Indian peasant studies, which represents a refinement and extension of some 'Subaltern Studies' work as, by the mid-1990s, several Subalternists were undertaking fieldwork with the descendants of rebellious peasants.⁴⁸ Thus, Gold and Gujar, drawing on 1990s interviews with North Indian peasants, reconstructed daily life in the former princely state of Sawar⁴⁹ from the 1930s-1950s. They used marginalised groups' memories to challenge the post-colonial Indian state's development policies, highlighting peasants' concerns over declining crop quality due to

⁴² Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma', in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *SS III* (New Delhi, 1984), 53-5.

⁴³ David Ludden (ed.), *Reading Subaltern Studies* (London, 2002), 43-429.

⁴⁴ Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt', 166-85; Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma', 7-50.

⁴⁵ Sumit Sarkar, 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy', in Guha, *SS III*, 273-4; Tanika Sarkar, 'Jitu Santal's Movement in Malda', in Guha, *SS IV*, 152-3, 153n51; C.A. Bayly, 'Rallying Around the Subaltern', *The Journal of Peasant Studies (JPS)*, 16, 1 (1988), 119; Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Recovering the Subject', *MAS*, 22, 1 (1988), 214; Vinayak Chaturvedi, 'C. A. Bayly's Unfinished Business', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies (SA: JSAS)*, 45 1 (2022), 87, 102.

⁴⁶ Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (New Delhi, 1997), 82.

⁴⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London, 1986); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago, 1988), 271-313; Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism', *AHR*, 99, 5 (1994), 1480-3; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, 2000).

⁴⁸ Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory* (Berkeley, 1995), 117-191; David Hardiman, *Feeding the Baniya* (New Delhi, 1996), ix; cf. Vinayak Chaturvedi, *Peasant Pasts* (Berkeley and London, 2007), 169-232.

⁴⁹ Now in Rajasthan.

chemical fertilisers and nostalgia for princely rule, thereby questioning the state's democratic legitimacy.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the momentum in Indian historiography is with 'intellectual history',⁵¹ one of the more stimulating and innovative approaches to Indian history generally. Through various political thought methodologies, intellectual historians of India have addressed a broad range of themes, such as the transformation of Indian legal codes,⁵² the reception of classical texts,⁵³ the emergence of new thought categories such as 'culture',⁵⁴ the development of Indian traditions of nationalist,⁵⁵ liberal,⁵⁶ secular⁵⁷ and revolutionary thought,⁵⁸ the political thinking of Indian Muslims up to and beyond the creation of Pakistan in 1947,⁵⁹ and the politics of non-violence⁶⁰ and violence.⁶¹

Despite the richness of this literature, there has been relatively little enquiry into agrarian political thought. One exception is Raza's *Revolutionary Pasts*, which investigated how the Kirti Kisan Sabha⁶² tried to mobilise peasants into a revolutionary movement in 1920s Punjab.⁶³

⁵⁰ Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows* (Durham, NC, 2002), 78-104, 281-2, 316-17.

⁵¹ Shruti Kapila (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010).

⁵² Jon E. Wilson, 'Anxieties of Distance', in Kapila, *Intellectual History*, 1-17.

⁵³ Michael S. Dodson, 'Contesting Translations', in Kapila, *Intellectual History*, 35-51; Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji (eds.), *Political Thought in Action* (New Delhi, 2013); Maria Misra, 'The Indian Machiavelli', *MAS*, 50, 1 (2016), 310-344.

⁵⁴ Andrew Sartori, 'Beyond Culture-Contact and Colonial Discourse', in Kapila, *Intellectual History*, 68-84; idem, *Bengal in Global Concept History* (Chicago, 2009).

⁵⁵ Shruti Kapila, 'Self, Spencer and *Swaraj*: Nationalist Thought and Critiques of Liberalism, 1890-1920', in idem, *Intellectual History*, 98-116; Sugata Bose, 'The Spirit and Form of An Ethical Polity', in Kapila, *Intellectual History*, 117-132.

⁵⁶ Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London, 1997); C. A. Bayly, 'Rammohan Roy and the Advent of Constitutional Liberalism in India', in Kapila, *Intellectual History*, 18-34; idem, *Recovering Liberties* (Cambridge, 2012); idem, 'The Ends of Liberalism and the Political Thought of Nehru's India', *Modern Intellectual History* (MIH), 12, 3 (2015), 605-626; Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire* (Princeton, 2010); Rochana Bajpai, *Debating Difference* (New Delhi, 2011); Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire* (Berkeley, CA, 2014); Vikram Visana, *Uncivil Liberalism* (Cambridge, 2022).

⁵⁷ Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism* (Bloomington, 2008); Amar Sohal, *The Muslim Secular* (Oxford, 2023).

⁵⁸ Chris Moffat, *India's Revolutionary Inheritance* (Cambridge, 2019).

⁵⁹ Faisal Devji, 'Apologetic Modernity', in Kapila *Intellectual History*, 52-67; idem, *Muslim Zion* (London, 2013); Ayesha Jayal, 'Striking a Just Balance', in Kapila, *Intellectual History*, 85-97; Javed Majeed, 'Geographies of Subjectivity', in Kapila, *Intellectual History*, 133-149.

⁶⁰ Faisal Devji, *The Impossible Indian* (London, 2012); Karuna Mantena, 'Another Realism', *ASPR*, 106, 2. (2012), 455-470; Ajay Skaria, *Unconditional Equality* (Minneapolis, 2016).

⁶¹ R. E. Upton, 'Take Out a Thorn With a Thorn', *Global Intellectual History*, 2, 3 (2017), 329-349; Shruti Kapila, *Violent Fraternity* (Princeton, 2021).

⁶² Workers' and Peasants' Party.

⁶³ Ali Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts* (Cambridge, 2020), 102-149.

Another is Ali's analysis of the Krishak Praja Party⁶⁴ (1929-), and its leader A. K. Fazlul Huq (1873-1962), which formed Bengal's first provincial government following the state's elections of 1937.⁶⁵ Siegel, meanwhile, has acknowledged that, in the 1930s, Singh, Ranga and Sahajanand began to theorise 'the *kisan raj* - rule of peasants - that would emerge as the dominant social order in independent India'.⁶⁶ Finally, Balasubramanian has written a detailed analysis of the 'agrarian economic internationalism' of Ranga,⁶⁷ and Gill has investigated the intellectual history of the concept of the 'peasant' itself in colonial Punjab.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, a thorough political and intellectual history of how agrarian thought intersected with party politics in twentieth century Indian history remains lacking.

This thesis, therefore, follows the Subalternists in their interest in ideas, but will supplement their approach with an 'intellectual history' frame to explore the ideologies of 'elite' agrarian thinkers. Thus, I will concentrate on four authors whose ideas can be shown to have had a real mobilising power among peasants: Chhotu Ram, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, N. G. Ranga and Charan Singh.

Though not peasants themselves, Ram, Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh greatly influenced peasant politics, with their ideas resonating rurally; notably, Ram co-founded the Punjab Unionist Party, which won the 1937 Punjab elections.⁶⁹ Sahajanand and Ranga, moreover, were key players in the establishment of the AIKS in 1936.⁷⁰ The AIKS, the first all-India body of *kisan sabhas*,⁷¹ united Communists, Congress Socialists, and followers of Sahajanand and Ranga to demand abolition of the British-era *zamindari* system.⁷² Sahajanand was the AIKS' first President. Ranga was its first General Secretary.⁷³

⁶⁴ Peasant People's Party.

⁶⁵ Tariq Omar Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital* (Princeton, 2018), 137-167.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Robert Siegel, *Hungry Nation* (Cambridge, 2018), 157.

⁶⁷ Aditya Balasubramanian, *Toward a Free Economy* (Princeton, 2023), 163-79.

⁶⁸ Navyug Gill, *Labors of Division* (Stanford, 2024), 67-119.

⁶⁹ Stephen Oren, 'The Sikhs, Congress and the Unionists in British Punjab', *MAS*, 8, 3 (1974), 398.

⁷⁰ M. A. Rasul, *A History of the All-India Kisan Sabha* (Calcutta, 1974).

⁷¹ Peasant societies.

⁷² Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley, 1959), 384-95.

⁷³ Walter Hauser and K. C. Jha, *Culture, Vernacular Politics, and the Peasants* (New Delhi, 2015), 493-6.

Singh, however, was never involved in the AIKS,⁷⁴ but he contributed to many of the debates and issues that energised it, not least the issue of how to abolish the *zamindari* system,⁷⁵ who the peasant was and the relevance of Gandhian and Marxist ideas to Indian politics. These issues also concerned Ram, and Singh remains the only Indian Prime Minister firmly aligned with rural interests.⁷⁶

This approach would provide a more robust analysis of agrarian politics than the Subalternists can achieve as it is able to rely on written sources. To Sahajanand, for example, the fact that the AIKS produced paperwork made it technically superior to previous unorganised peasant rebellions that lacked the guidance of educated leaders and indulged in desperate and ultimately unproductive violence.⁷⁷ Guha's failure to cite AIKS records was also a source of early scholarly criticism.⁷⁸

Furthermore, Ram, Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh all have large archives of published and unpublished sources related to their political careers. These sources include a wide range of published texts, pamphlets, speeches and correspondence. The most important collections of these are: *Sir Chhotu Ram: Writings and Speeches* (2022),⁷⁹ *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati Rachnawali* (2010),⁸⁰ an online repository of 'books' by N.G. Ranga,⁸¹ and *Charan Singh: Selected Works (1947-1986)* (2020).⁸² Additionally, illuminating material can be found in the Ram Singh Jakhar⁸³ Papers, the Swami Sahajanand Saraswati Papers and the Charan Singh Papers at the Prime Ministers Museum and Library (PMML) and from the N.G. Ranga Papers at the National Archives of

⁷⁴ Paul R. Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1 (New Delhi and London, 2011), 93n13.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 87-124.

⁷⁶ Ashutosh Varshney, *Democracy, Development and the Countryside* (Cambridge, 1995), 101-5; Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India* (Cambridge, 2000), 65; Paul R. Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3 (Los Angeles, 2014), 256-8; Sunil Khilnani, *Incarnations* (London, 2016), 558-69.

⁷⁷ Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (hereafter Sahajanand), *Kisan Sabha ke Sansmaran* [*Recollections of the Kisan Sabha*] (Allahabad, 1947), 5-6, 13-18.

⁷⁸ Sangeeta Singh et al., 'Subaltern Studies II', *Social Scientist (SS)*, 12, 10 (1984), 6.

⁷⁹ Raghuvendra Tanwar (ed.), *Sir Chhotu Ram*, 5 Vols (Kurukshetra, 2022).

⁸⁰ Raghav Sharan Sharma (ed.), *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati Rachnawali* [*Selected Works of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati*], 6 Vols. [2003] (New Delhi, 2010).

⁸¹ 'Books', *Ngranga.in*, <https://ngranga.in/works.html> (Accessed 30/09/2025).

⁸² *Charan Singh*, 7 Vols. (Gurgaon, 2020).

⁸³ An associate of Chhotu Ram.

India (NAI). Finally, there is also a considerable amount of published colonial archival records⁸⁴ and Government of India reports,⁸⁵ which can be used to contextualise the ideological and material environments in which these individuals operated.

Such sources are valuable as illiterate peasants leave few records, and they often destroyed state documents during nineteenth century rebellions - which Guha termed the 'peasants' hatred for the written word'. Lacking folkloric sources, he turned to 'elitist' colonial archives, arguing they could be reinterpreted to recover peasant agency.⁸⁶ And while later Subaltern authors consulted more vernacular sources,⁸⁷ and some conducted fieldwork as mentioned earlier, this practice became essential to the overall Subaltern approach to agrarian political history.

Ram and others, however, represent a crucial but neglected agrarian tradition, often overlooked by Subaltern historians due to their non-violent activism and intermediary status.⁸⁸ Thus, while Das highlighted Sahajanand's role as a precursor to post-colonial peasant movements in Bihar,⁸⁹ no Subaltern historian appears to have worked on Ram, Ranga or Singh. With their rural roots and village insight, activist-intellectuals merit closer study, as relying only on scholars risks missing their valuable perspectives on agrarian politics.⁹⁰

In this context, this thesis aims to transform our understanding of Ram, Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh by 'converting' them, following Kapila, from 'political actors' to 'political thinkers'.⁹¹ But it does not completely collapse the former into the latter because Ram and others were both sophisticated thinkers and influential politicians. Rather, exploring their political thought will help us understand their political behaviour better. Specifically, examining their ideologies shows how Ram aligned with Muslim elites over Hindu nationalism, Sahajanand fused Marxism and

⁸⁴ E.g., Vijay Kumar (ed.), *Kisan Movement*, 8 Vols. (Patna, 2015-17).

⁸⁵ E.g. *Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agricultural Planning & Techniques* (New Delhi, 1956).

⁸⁶ Guha, *Aspects*, 14-17, 51-2; idem, 'Prose of Counter-Insurgency', 1-26.

⁸⁷ Cf. Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories* (New Delhi, 1999), 186n21, 214n9.

⁸⁸ Bayly, 'Subaltern', 116.

⁸⁹ Arvind N. Das, 'Agrarian Change from Above and Below', in Guha, *SS II*, 180-227.

⁹⁰ Walter Hauser, 'Peasants, Activists, and Scholars', in Chittabrata Palit et al. (eds.), *Political Economy and Protest in Colonial India* (Calcutta, 1997), 252.

⁹¹ Kapila, *Fraternity*, 2.

Hindu thought to advocate for all peasants, Ranga once allied with Sahajanand despite later ‘conservatism’, and Singh saw increasing success as an independent politician by the 1970s.

To analyse the ideologies of Ram and these other politician-theorists, the thesis deploys the category of ‘agrarian populism’. Following Canovan, I define ‘agrarian populism’ as a form of ‘rural radicalism’, aiming to represent the ‘people’ (peasantry) against various urban ‘elites’, rooted in peasants or farmer base and likely to emerge under modernisation, often sharing a common economic agenda. Within ‘agrarian populism’, moreover, Canovan discerns three ‘ideal types’, namely, ‘farmers’ radicalism’, ‘intellectual agrarian socialism’ and the ideology of ‘peasant movements.’⁹²

The classic example of the first type is the U. S. People’s Party (1892-1909), which grew out of grassroots farmer movements in the American South and West. Its 1892 Omaha Platform called for, *inter alia*, a national system of agricultural warehouses, free silver coinage, a graduated income tax, government-run postal savings banks, and the nationalisation of railroads, telegraphs, and telephones.⁹³

The second type is exemplified by the Narodniks⁹⁴ of nineteenth and early twentieth century Russia. Rooted in the writings of Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) and culminating in the clandestine *Narodnaya Volya*⁹⁵ organisation, which assassinated Tsar Alexander II (b. 1818) in 1881, *narodnichestvo*⁹⁶ was a form of agrarian socialism centered on the *obshchina*.⁹⁷ It combined revolutionary terrorism, disdain for liberal reform, emphasis on individual agency and ideas in history, and a vision of a unique Russian historical path.⁹⁸

The third type is best exemplified by the agrarian parties that gained prominence in Eastern Europe during the ‘Green Rising’. Leaders like Aleksandar Stamboliyski (1879-1923), of

⁹² Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (London, 1981), 8, 13.

⁹³ Ibid., 17-58.

⁹⁴ Populists.

⁹⁵ People’s Will.

⁹⁶ Populism.

⁹⁷ Village commune.

⁹⁸ Canovan, *Populism*, 59-97.

Bulgaria's Agrarian National Union (f. 1889), championed small-scale peasant proprietorship based on a belief that property should belong to those who work on it, voluntary cooperatives for credit and resources to support farming by peasant proprietors, land redistribution from large estates, nationalisation of heavy industries, modest agricultural mechanisation and a commitment to democratic, constitutional governance through 'estatist' parties based on 'producer' interests.⁹⁹

Furthermore, Canovan's discussion of these three 'ideal types', which were all broadly left of centre on the political spectrum and claimed to represent the 'people' (peasantry) against a number of urban 'elite' groups,¹⁰⁰ also contains examples from other countries such as Canada's Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (1932-1961), a precursor to the country's centre-left New Democratic Party (1961-), as placed in type one, the 'African socialism' of the first President of Tanzania Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), and others, as placed in type two, and Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919)'s movement in Morelos during the Mexican Revolution (1910-20) as placed in type three.¹⁰¹ However, no reference is made to 'agrarian populist' leaders, thinkers or parties from India.

Despite this, if we were to include Chhotu Ram and others' 'agrarian populist' ideologies within Canovan's typology, then they are closest to the third variety. The most revealing reflection of this is their strong interest in policies of land reform designed to populate the countryside with small peasant proprietor farms by contrast to large socialised or capitalist farms, agrarian cooperatives in consumption rather than in production to protect these proprietary rights and their holders from exploitative money lenders among others plus their decision to stand for parliamentary election to achieve grassroots democratic approval to pursue them, the hallmark of the Eastern European 'agrarian populist' policy agenda which ultimately straddled

⁹⁹ Ibid., 110-28.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 13-14, 98-100.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 100-2, 108-10, 130.

between 'liberal' and 'socialist' platforms,¹⁰² and which Canovan primarily applied to distinguish this sub-category.

This ideological similarity likely stems from the fact that Ram and others plus most Eastern European peasant leaders like Stamboliyski, while not peasants themselves, originated from peasant families - unlike the Narodniks who came from the educated urban elite with aristocratic or clerical backgrounds.¹⁰³ Additionally, the peasants they represented were, albeit landed and sometimes money lending themselves, were still, at least until the 1980s, primarily subsistence rather than market producers and therefore less commercially oriented than the farmers driving the U. S. People's Party,¹⁰⁴ although some, such as the Kamma community from which Ranga came, were beginning to move beyond agriculture into various industries (see chapter 3). Finally, early twentieth-century India and Eastern Europe, shared similar socio-economic conditions as overwhelmingly rural societies, including vulnerability to famine, land shortages, fragmented landholdings, and rural indebtedness.¹⁰⁵

My analysis in this respect therefore differs from similar, past work on 'agrarian populism' in India which tends to link it to Russian Neo-Populism and/or U. S. Populism. Datta, for example, has argued that Ram should be placed 'within an Indian variant of a neo-populist tradition',¹⁰⁶ drawing on Byres' definition of 'neo-populism' to define it as an ideology that espouses peasant proprietorship, anti-capitalism, anti-urbanism and a notion of 'undifferentiated and supposedly exploited countryside'.¹⁰⁷

This definition of 'neo-populism' is, however, problematic as it is solely based on the thought of the Russian agrarian economist Alexander Chayanov (1888-1937).¹⁰⁸ After all, Chayanov did not share the interest of the Narodniks in the Russian peasantry's traditions of collective land

¹⁰² John D. Bell, *Peasants in Power* (Princeton, 1977), 55-84, 154-83; Alex Toshkov, *Agrarianism as Modernity in 20th Century Europe* (London, 2019), 17; Jakub S. Beneš, *The Last Peasant War* (Princeton, 2025), 201-36, esp. 222.

¹⁰³ Canovan, *Populism*, 60-3, 68.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 18-30, 56, 129.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 113-15.

¹⁰⁶ Nonica Datta, *Forming an Identity* (New Delhi, 1999), 112.

¹⁰⁷ Terence J. Byres, 'Charan Singh (1902-87)', *JPS*, 15, 2 (1988) cited in *ibid.*, 112n153.

¹⁰⁸ Idem, 'Of Neo-Populist Pipe Dreams', *JPS*, 6, 2 (1979) cited in *idem*, 'Charan Singh', 168.

ownership through the village commune (*obshchina*), which they believed provided the route towards a socialist future, as well as staple Narodnik issues of land reform and/or socialisation. Also, Chayanov did not closely associate himself with Russian Neo-Populist parties, such as the Socialist Revolutionary Party (1902-40) (PSR).¹⁰⁹ In fact, card-carrying Russian Neo-Populists, such as V. M. Chernov (1873-1952) of the PSR, were opposed to the development of capitalism in Russia specifically because it would lead to the development of a class of peasant proprietors, which would undermine the *obshchina*'s communal culture.¹¹⁰ This sentiment is in conflict with Ram's agenda to advance the interests of this group.

Furthermore, Brass, referring to Singh's *Why 60% of Services Should Be Reserved for Sons of Cultivators?* (1947),¹¹¹ argued that Singh's assertion that 'it is the agriculturists ... who are entitled to be called the people - the masses of the U.P' is essentially a 'populist or a *narodnik* statement'.¹¹² Moreover, commenting on Singh's correspondence from 1962 which includes expressions of opposition to the proposals of the UP government to introduce a 50% surcharge on land revenue in UP, discussed further in chapter 4, Brass argues that Singh's letters 'as in much else of his writings, ring like those of William Jennings Bryan,¹¹³ in the rhetoric of the agrarian populist'.¹¹⁴ Thus, the tendency in this case is to take Russian and U.S. 'agrarian populism' as comparators for Indian 'agrarian populists' rather than Eastern European 'agrarian populism.'

Finally, Jaffrelot and Tillin also analyse Singh's thought through the category of 'agrarian populism' - arguing that his ideology developed in response to Indira Gandhi (1917-1984)'s 'socialist' populism which sought to appeal to the rural and urban poor by promising to 'eradicate poverty' in the 1970s. By contrast, Jaffrelot and Tillin argue that Singh's 'agrarian

¹⁰⁹ Lucian George, 'Interpreting Alexander Chayanov's Peasant Utopia Since 1991', *Historia i polityka*, 45, 38 (2021), 20-1.

¹¹⁰ Oliver H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism* (New York, 1958), 11-12.

¹¹¹ Charan Singh, *Why 60 Per Cent. Services Should Be Reserved for Sons of Cultivators* (Lucknow, 1947).

¹¹² Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 78.

¹¹³ The Democratic nominee, endorsed by the People's Party, at the 1896 U. S. Presidential elections. Cf. Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero* (New York, 2006).

¹¹⁴ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 131.

populism' claimed greater authenticity by speaking for 'true people' who were not only poor and anti-establishment but also land rooted. Thus, Singh promised to defend peasant proprietor interests against merchants, money lenders, and urban populations while reorienting India's priorities from urban industrial development toward agriculture. So, in this account, Singh was a 'populist' both because he challenged the urban establishment in the name of rural 'true people' and because he claimed to represent all these people collectively.¹¹⁵

However, while this approach places Singh's ideology effectively within the political and ideological context of the 1970s, Jaffrelot's and Tillin's approach to 'populism', while also acknowledging its strategic and cultural aspects, essentially follows Mudde's 'ideational' definition of 'populism' as a 'thin ideology', meaning it has a less complex structure than other ideologies like 'socialism', which is rooted in three 'core concepts': 'the people', the 'elite' and the 'general will'.¹¹⁶ Consequently, the precise nature of Singh's 'agrarian populism', especially in relation to Canovan's tripartite typology of 'agrarian populism' is unclear. Enquiring into this further, via the Canovanite approach, I argue, is important as it helps provide greater insight into the precise nature of the 'agrarian populist' ideologies of Singh and our other figures.

Nevertheless, while a comparison between Eastern Europe and India is heuristically useful, it should not be overstated for three reasons. First, while socio-economic structures shape ideologies to some extent - which can be defined in a Freeddenite sense as forms of political thought which bring together 'core' (essential to the ideology), 'adjacent' (associated with the ideology) plus 'peripheral' (marginal to the ideology and/or policy stances proposed by political ideologues) concepts which are interpreted in specific, 'decontested' ways and arranged in various combinations over time - given their role in mobilising political constituencies,¹¹⁷ they do not necessarily produce universal intellectual responses. Second, while Singh and Ranga

¹¹⁵ Christophe Jaffrelot and Louise Tillin, 'Populism in India', in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism (OHP)* (Oxford, 2017), 181-3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 179-80; cf. Cas Mudde, 'Populism', in Kaltwasser et al., *OHP*, 29-34, 42n3.

¹¹⁷ Michael Freedden, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford, 1996), 14-15, 40-1, 75-91.

occasionally referenced Eastern Europe,¹¹⁸ there is little evidence that Ram or Sahajanand did so. Third, their ‘agrarian populism’ was distinctly ‘Indian’, emerging in the 1920s under British colonial rule, a markedly different context from that operated in by Eastern European ‘agrarian populists’, who rose in the wake of imperial collapse following World War One.¹¹⁹

Therefore, despite the striking similarity between Chhotu Ram and others’ ‘agrarian populist’ ideology and its Eastern European counterpart, ‘agrarian populism’ in India, above all the ‘agrarian populism’ of Ram, is better understood as initially emerging from a potential fourth ‘ideal type’ of ‘agrarian populism’ - which became an ‘adjacent’ concept in Ram’s ideology and goes beyond Canovan’s three types - which might be termed ‘imperial populism’. After all, in Punjab, British colonial officials ever since John Lawrence (1811-1879), the Chief Commissioner and later Lieutenant Governor of the province from 1853-9, claimed to represent the peasantry to justify British rule.¹²⁰

Additionally, Ram may well have agreed with Lord Curzon (1859-1925), the Viceroy of India (1899-1905), and his assertion in 1900 that the Punjab Land Alienation Act (LAA), passed that year to restrict the passage of agricultural land from ‘agriculturist’ to ‘non-agriculturist’ tribes in light of growing rural indebtedness from the mid-nineteenth century,¹²¹ had been enacted for the benefit of the Indian ‘people’, i.e. the peasantry, against criticism from the Indian National Congress¹²² (1885-), which had a strong urban and mercantile character in Punjab,¹²³ who he felt merely represented a small Indian ‘elite’ who did not understand the ‘feelings and aspirations of India’.¹²⁴ Indeed, Ram, whose Unionist Party declared in its Constitution of 1923 that ‘the party

¹¹⁸ Charan Singh, *Abolition of Zamindari* (Allahabad, 1947), 153, 209, 216-17; N. G. Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants* (New Delhi, 1949), 138-161.

¹¹⁹ Canovan, *Populism*, 113.

¹²⁰ N. M. Khilnani, *British Power in the Punjab* (Bombay and London, 1972), 112; cf. P. H. M. van den Dungen, *The Punjab Tradition* (London, 1972); Dara Milnes Price, ‘Through District Eyes’, (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2005), ch. 3; Gill, *Division*, ch. 1.

¹²¹ N. G. Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill* (Durham, NC, 1966), 1-78.

¹²² Hereafter Congress.

¹²³ Gerald A. Heeger, ‘The Growth of the Congress Movement in Punjab’, *The Journal of Asian Studies (JAS)*, 32, 1 (1972), 40.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Barrier, *Alienation*, 59; cf. John R. McLane, ‘Peasants, Money-Lenders and Nationalists’, *IESHR*, 1, 1 (1963), 66-73.

stands by the Land Alienation Act, as a measure calculated to protect the rural people with landed interests as a backward caste',¹²⁵ in a PLC debate regarding the amendment of the Punjab Land Revenue Bill on 8 May 1928, explicitly invoked Curzon's Land Resolution of 1903 to argue that the state should not be able to claim more than a maximum of 25% of Punjab's land.¹²⁶

Therefore, while my notion of 'imperial populism' is limited by the fact that Curzon, and British administrators generally, had a fundamentally 'elitist', hierarchical world view,¹²⁷ it nevertheless appears reasonable to argue, considering this evidence alongside a broader phenomenon whereby 'populist' ideology is ultimately not about class identity but rather a shared morality whereby 'elites' can claim they share the values of the 'people' and become 'populist' leaders,¹²⁸ that the 'agrarian populist' aspects of imperial discourse means there is a considerable colonial genealogy to the initial emergence of 'agrarian populist' ideology in India, as we will discuss further in chapter 1.

Thus, this thesis explains how and why 'agrarian populist' ideologies emerged in India with Ram's creation of the Unionist Party in 1923 and perhaps reached their zenith in 1979 with Singh's appointment as Prime Minister. These ideologies defined the peasantry as the 'people' against urban 'elites' and advocated land reform protecting peasant proprietors, service-based cooperatives, and grassroots parliamentary democracy. Its main purpose is to show how 'agrarian populist' ideology, initially a marginal creed like Gandhian developmental thought,¹²⁹ confined mostly to specific regions like Punjab and Bihar, became a staple of oppositional discourse to the Nehruvian developmental policies of early independent India and ultimately made a forceful intervention in the politics of the post-Nehruvian period, c.1964-80.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Narendra Nath, *Memorandum on the Rights Claimed by Hindu Minority in North-West India* (Lahore, 1928), 167.

¹²⁶ Chhotu Ram (hereafter CR), 'The Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Bill', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 367.

¹²⁷ David Gilmour, *Curzon* (London, 1995), 30ff; cf. David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism* (Oxford and New York, 2001), 48 and *passim*.

¹²⁸ Paul A. Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham, 2000), 41-5 and *passim*; Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism* (New York, 2017), 70-1.

¹²⁹ Benjamin Zachariah, *Developing India* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2005), 156-210.

This broad, regionally diverse approach, focusing on four politicians across India, allows us to consider how ‘agrarian populist’ ideology varied by region and influenced both pre- and post-independence Indian politics. After all, as Devji has argued in the context of the political thought of Indian Muslims in colonial India, the exclusion of Ram and others from full political power ‘permitted them a thoughtful reflection ... [which] went beyond ... purely instrumental concerns ... to constitute a specific way of thinking’.¹³⁰ Their ideologies also reflect what Kapila observed about Indian political thought more generally - it was shaped mainly by political actors focused on making change rather than solely theorising.¹³¹ Moreover, like the thinking of the young Muslim intellectuals studied by Zaman, they were necessarily tilted towards the future.¹³²

The thesis argues that Ram first articulated ‘agrarian populist’ ideology in Indian politics, defining the peasantry as small proprietors or LAA-protected tenants opposed to urban moneylenders. Combining British ‘imperial populism’ with elements of Hindu jurisprudence, his ideology advocated agrarian reform, debt relief, service cooperatives and a limited, predominantly agrarian democracy. It gained influence in 1930s Punjab as the Great Depression intensified the demand for reform, enabling Ram to advance major agrarian laws later praised by Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh (see chapters 2-4).

The experience of the ‘Great Depression’ was also formative for the early political careers, and ‘ideological innovations’,¹³³ of Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh too, with all their movements and/or careers taking off in the 1930s. This makes this context the *sine qua non* for understanding the importance of ‘agrarian populism’ in their thinking given its varied impacts across their regions (see chapters 1-4).

However, their ideologies also differed: Ram’s support for ‘imperial populism’ was not shared by Sahajanand who, influenced by Gandhian *satyagraha* and Bihar’s socialist left, defined the

¹³⁰ Devji, ‘Modernity’, 56.

¹³¹ Kapila, *Fraternity*, 5.

¹³² Faridah Zaman, ‘Futurity and the Political Thought of North Indian Muslims’, (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2015).

¹³³ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 2002), 148-57.

interests of an undifferentiated peasantry primarily against *zamindars* which did not exist in Punjab on account of its different land revenue system (see chapters 1-2). Thus, the chief antagonist shifted from the money lender to the large aristocratic landlord, though like Ram, Sahajanand was also hostile to money lenders and utilised a general 'peasant' vs 'elite' ideological approach. But despite this, Sahajanand also supported cooperative farming alongside service cooperatives, unlike Ram, who largely ignored the former, c.1920-34, although he did state in 1943 that, in 1938, he had supported organising such farms via an 'experiment' on 5000 acres of 'reserved' land but had received advice from officials that it was unlikely to succeed. He also expressed doubts about whether socialised farms were suitable in Punjab given the 'strong individualistic tendencies which are ingrained in the nature of the Punjab peasant'.¹³⁴ Regardless, 'imperial populism' moved from an 'adjacent' to a 'peripheral' concept in Indian 'agrarian populist' ideology, while 'Gandhian' ideas became 'adjacent' to 'agrarian populism' in India for the first time. Ram's interest in Hindu jurisprudence was, however, maintained by Sahajanand although in a different context (see chapter 2).

In the 1950s, moreover, Ranga, who defined 'peasant' interests against money lenders, *zamindars* and also state planning officials after the establishment of a centralised 'socialistic' developmental regime by the Government of India in 1950,¹³⁵ and especially, Singh, who advocated for 'peasant' interests against a similar range of groups, maintained Gandhian ideas as an 'adjacent' feature of their 'agrarian populist' ideologies but, like Ranga, strongly opposed the widespread adoption of cooperative farming for national development at the expense of farms worked by peasant proprietors and their families. However, Ranga and Singh did support their use on an 'experimental basis', (see chapters 3-4), like Ram did in 1938 (see above), while Sahajanand only argued for cooperative farms to be used in rather limited circumstances and expressed support for small farms worked by peasant proprietors too (see chapter 2).

¹³⁴ CR, 'Irrigation Policy', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 3, 601.

¹³⁵ I.e. the Indian Planning Commission (1950-2014).

What is more, Ranga and Singh, also like Ram and Sahajanand, maintained an interest in Hindu jurisprudential ideas as an ‘adjacent’ concept, (see chapters 3-4), to legitimise the rights of landed peasants with their ideas regarding land reform designed to benefit these groups and create more of them, Ram excepted on the latter point given his ‘imperial populism’. But like Ram and Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh also supported the use of cooperatives in services to support small peasant proprietors, not large agricultural capitalist or socialised farms usually favoured by ‘liberals’ or ‘socialists’, and the use of democratic methods to pursue their goals and entrench democracy in India at the rural level through ‘peasant’-based parties.

Overall, Indian ‘agrarian populist’ ideology, embodied by Ram and others, was always rooted in a binary, c.1920-80, between ‘peasants’ and an ‘elite’, with the various ‘elite’ groups reflecting regional particularities and temporal developments. Its ‘adjacent’ concepts also developed from ‘imperial populism’ to Hindu jurisprudential and Gandhian ideas and shaped a generally consistent policy approach to land reform, cooperatives and democracy.

By tracing the origins of ‘agrarian populist’ ideology back to the 1920s and 1930s, the thesis therefore make its first contribution to the literature, which is to suggest that the roots of ‘agrarian populist’ ideology are much deeper in India than has been suggested hitherto, as most historical accounts of ‘agrarian populism’ begin in the 1960s with the rise of Charan Singh in North Indian and then national politics resulting in his appointment as Prime Minister in 1979 or with the New Farmers’ Movements from the late 1970s/1980s.¹³⁶ And while Subramanian has argued that ‘populism was apparent in ... Gandhi’s anti-modernist rhetoric that brought peasants and artisans into the Indian nationalist movement’,¹³⁷ the specific focus on Ram and others

¹³⁶ Mangesh Venkatesh Nadkarni, *Farmers’ Movement in India* (Ahmedabad, 1987), ch. 1 and *passim*; Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments* (Durham, NC, 1998); 75-105; Varshney, *Development*, chs. 4-5; Tom Brass (ed.), *New Farmers’ Movements in India* (London, 1995); Corbridge and Harriss, *India*, 82-92, 104ff; Maria Misra, *Vishnu’s Crowded Temple (VCT)* (London, 2007), 314-17, 359-60; Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, 3 Vols; D. N. Dhanagare, *Populism and Power* (London, 2016), *passim*; Jaffrelot and Tillin, ‘Populism’, 182-4; Shray Mehta and Shreya Sinha, ‘The Rise and Fall of Agrarian Populism in Post-Colonial India’, *Sociological Bulletin (SB)*, 71, 4 (2022), 603-6.

¹³⁷ Narendra Subramanian, ‘Populism in India’, *The SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 27, 1 (2007), 82.

allows us to, following Bayly, ‘sketch a wider context for the intellectual rediscovery of the peasantry’ in early twentieth century India and thereby, to some extent, ‘provincialise’ Gandhi.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Bayly, *Liberties*, 279.

Chapter 1: ‘Zamindar Raj’ (Peasant Rule): Sir Chhotu Ram (1881-1945) and the Dawn of Agrarian Populism in Colonial India, c.1920-34

This chapter examines the ‘agrarian populist’ ideology of Sir Chhotu Ram, a prominent Unionist Party leader in colonial Punjab, c.1923–47. It proposes ‘agrarian populism’ - championing the small peasant proprietor or tenant against the moneylender, informed by ‘imperial populism’ and Hindu jurisprudential thought and expressed through land reform, cooperatives, and parliamentary democracy - as a lens for understanding Ram beyond the late colonial political history of Punjab, where historians have largely focused on his 1945 death and its consequences for the Unionist government, the Muslim League’s 1946 victory, and Partition.¹ This chapter therefore uses ‘agrarian populism’ to analyse Ram’s life and political career to c.1934, tracing his shift from revolutionary politics and Congress to the founding of the agrarian, inter-communal Unionist Party, whose reform programme first achieved major success with debt-relief legislation in 1934.

The scholarly literature offers four key interpretations of Ram’s ideology. In his 1972 doctoral thesis, Bajaj portrayed Ram as the ‘high-water mark of Indian liberalism’, stressing his efforts to organise Punjabi peasants not on the basis of his own caste or class but on an inter-communal and inter-class basis as symbolised by his strong opposition to his Muslim Unionist colleagues becoming members of the separatist Muslim League.² However, while Bajaj conducted a forensic examination of Ram’s career, ‘economic ideas’, ‘agricultural work’, ‘irrigational work’, ‘industrial work’, and ‘social-welfare work’,³ his study does not include a corresponding chapter on Ram’s ideology that develops the argument regarding his ‘liberalism’ in detail. This argument is also in tension with his subsequent, more illiberal and frankly ‘agrarian populist’ sounding claim that

¹ Imran Ali, *Punjab Politics in the Decade Before Partition* (Lahore, 1975), 35; Ian Talbot, ‘Deserted Collaborators’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 11, 1 (1982), 86; idem, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement* (Karachi and Oxford, 1988), 93-103; idem, *Khizr Tiwana* (Karachi and Oxford, 2002), 180; David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam* (London, 1988), 189-224; Raghuendra Tanwar, *Politics of Sharing Power* (New Delhi, 1999), 169; Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State* (New Delhi and London, 2005), 298.

² Y. P. Bajaj, ‘Sir Chhotu Ram and his Work’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kurukshetra University, 1972), v, 37-8.

³ Ibid., 1-256.

Ram identified Indianness with peasantness and argued that the state essentially had a moral duty to advance peasant interests.⁴ Lastly, Bajaj ascribes some ‘socialist’ tendencies to Ram’s ideology when, chiefly on the basis of a statement he made in 1937 that ‘I prefer to have the mentality of a worker and a peasant’, he argues that the Unionist Party sought to ‘establish socialism’,⁵ a position re-stated in the most recent scholarship.⁶

This last point brings Bajaj’s analysis back towards an older, influential ‘socialist’ view of Ram’s politics. After all, Ram once said that he considered himself to be ‘half a socialist’ and that the Unionist Party had ‘a fairly distinct tinge of socialism about it’.⁷ Thus, his colleague and biographer Tika Ram argued that Ram’s ‘socialism’ consisted of secularly organising Punjabi peasants regardless of caste or religion, a firm commitment to re-distributing power from the rich to the poor and the passage of agrarian legislation for ‘backward rural areas’.⁸ A similar case was then made by subsequent biographers of Ram,⁹ which Madan Gopal developed by noting that Ram was an early advocate for a six-day workweek, as well as for the introduction of a sales tax, *inter alia*, policies which, he says, were taken up in the ‘twenty-point economic programme’ of the socialist government of India’s third Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975.¹⁰ Additionally, Gopal also asserted in a later work that the agenda of the Janata Party,¹¹ which displaced Indira Gandhi from power in 1977 and Charan Singh was a key player in (see chapter 4), ‘were the core of the Unionist Party’s programme.’¹²

But while this ‘socialist’ interpretation is stronger than the ‘liberal’ view, especially as Ram supported state-led but ‘participatory’ industrial and agricultural development with the latter

⁴ Ibid., vi-vii.

⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶ Parveen Kumar, ‘Ideology, Action and Legacy’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kurukshetra University, 2015), 46-7; Ravinder Singh, ‘Re-Examining the Role of Sir Chhotu Ram’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2019), 27.

⁷ CR, ‘Letter to Mian Fazl-i-Hussain’, in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 2, 587.

⁸ Tika Ram, *Sir Chhotu Ram* [1946] (Hissar, 1979), 41-3.

⁹ Raghuvir Singh Shastri, *Chaudhary Chhotu Ram* (Rohtak, 1965), 11; H. L. Agnihotri and Shiva N. Malik, *A Profile in Courage* (New Delhi, 1978), 40.

¹⁰ Madan Gopal, *Sir Chhotu Ram: A Political Biography* (New Delhi, 1977), xi-xii.

¹¹ People’s Party.

¹² Madan Gopal, *Sir Chhotu Ram: The Man & The Vision* (Ghaziabad, 1997), 50.

given priority over the former,¹³ an important issue to consider is that if Ram was a ‘socialist’ then, as D. C. Verma has put it, his ‘socialism’ was not ‘inspired by Marx or other western thinkers’.¹⁴ Consequently, there does not appear to be any significant international, socialist links for Ram, which suggests that a ‘populist’ framing, alongside a ‘socialist’ one, might be useful for understanding the ‘agrarian’ thrust of his politics because, as we will see, Ram’s rhetoric was premised on a rural/urban divide which pitched the peasantry against urban money lenders in particular.

In 1984, however, Chowdhry offered a strong challenge to the ‘liberal’ and ‘socialist’ views of Ram when she argued that while he presented himself as a progressive spokesman for all peasants, he was really a rather ‘conservative’ figure.¹⁵ To justify her view, Chowdhry points to Ram’s collaboration with imperial officials to support the interests of the ‘upper stratum of the Jat peasantry’, the community from which he came and who controlled most landholdings in his home district of Rohtak, his definition of the ‘zamindar’¹⁶ via reference to colonial legislation that defined the peasant as a small proprietor or tenant although in practice through ideas about caste, and his assurance that he would not tolerate his followers joining more radical, Communist affiliated groups.¹⁷

Furthermore, Chowdhry argues that Unionist agrarian legislation disproportionately benefited larger landowners, citing the 1934 Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act, which Ram helped formulate. She points to its provisions on house repossession, which exempted rented or unoccupied houses, thereby benefiting owners of multiple properties.¹⁸ Therefore, while Chowdhry concedes that Ram occasionally used radical, ‘populist’ rhetoric to appeal to the peasantry, she nevertheless concludes that ‘his policy ... [was] guided by the dictates of [*sic*]

¹³ Anil Kumar Rathee and D. S. Nandal, *Sir Chhotu Ram and Punjab Economy Under Imperialism* (Rohtak, 1997), 116-17ff.

¹⁴ D. C. Verma, *Sir Chhotu Ram* (New Delhi, 1981), 25.

¹⁵ Prem Chowdhry, *Punjab Politics* (New Delhi, 1984), 225.

¹⁶ Peasant.

¹⁷ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 12ff, 198-9, 216.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 218, 253-4.

British Raj and the interests of the larger landowners' and thus 'remained essentially conservative.'¹⁹

But while it is true that Ram was sometimes quite gradualist in his land reform proposals as, for example, his 1928 initiative sought to impress upon the Government that the principles used in income tax assessment be applied to the assessment of land revenue, with the objective of achieving this transition within the next *forty years*,²⁰ and he was strongly opposed to communism given his 1930 statement that Punjab was uniquely well placed to 'withstand Bolshevism',²¹ Chowdhry's argument regarding the Relief of Indebtedness Act is slightly unfair. After all, it did, *inter alia*, reform the rules regarding applications for an insolvency petition downwards so that they would apply to debts of at least Rs. 250,²² and there is some evidence, discussed in section III below, which suggests that the Act benefitted small peasants.

Jaffrelot's alternative approach, meanwhile, casts Ram as the 'architect' of a specifically Indian tradition of '*kisan*'²³ politics'.²⁴ Its main features, he argues, include support for peasant proprietorship, hostility to merchant castes, *biradari*²⁵ between all agricultural castes, especially the Ahirs, Jats, Gurjars and Rajputs, and an urban-rural opposition.²⁶ However, while Jaffrelot does touch on Ram's political career in the 1920s, he does not fully explore it beyond an acknowledgement of his contribution to several Unionist policy achievements, especially on land reform.²⁷ Also, it is not clear what larger political family '*kisan* politics' forms a part of. But, while Jaffrelot does not explicitly describe Ram as an 'agrarian populist', his approach can be reasonably considered to be associated with 'agrarian populism' given that he considers Charan

¹⁹ Ibid., 225, 231.

²⁰ CR, 'Resolution Regarding Application of the Principles of Assessment of Income Tax to the Assessment of Land Revenue', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 342.

²¹ CR, 'Fall in Prices of Agricultural Produce', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 460.

²² *The Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act* (Lahore, 1941), 2.

²³ Peasant.

²⁴ Jaffrelot defines '*kisan* politics' as an 'ideology of social transformation which mobilised the rural poor by emphasising their common interests and separate identity as peasants'; idem, *India's Silent Revolution* (New York, 2003), 271, 275.

²⁵ Brotherhood.

²⁶ Jaffrelot, *Silent Revolution*, 276-9.

²⁷ Ibid., 277-8.

Singh also to belong to the '*kisan* politics' tradition,²⁸ a figure who he later argued developed an 'agrarian form of populism' in India from the 1960s (see introduction, chapter 4).²⁹

Overall, there is stark disagreement in the historiography regarding the nature of Ram's ideology. The following chapter therefore attempts to define the nature of Ram's 'agrarian populism', which he powerfully expressed as seeking to bring about 'zamindar raj'³⁰ in Punjab on 20 September 1929 in the Punjab Legislative Council (PLC),³¹ through a political narrative of his career, c.1920-34, designed to capture how and why his ideology was developed, then crystallised and made an important intervention in Punjabi politics. In so doing, my aim is not to make a strongly materialist link between socio-economic background and political ideas, but to examine how Ram's, Sahajanand's, Ranga's and Singh's intellectual interests and predispositions developed, shaping their political thought and action.³²

The first section traces Chhotu Ram's path to the Unionist Party by 1923 and the development of his 'agrarian populist' approach to parliamentary democracy. The second examines his parliamentary and ministerial record (c.1923–30), when his stance on cooperatives and land reform became apparent, though its potential remained unfulfilled. The third examines his central role in drafting the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act of 1934, demonstrating how his ideology shaped legislation responding to the Great Depression in Punjab.

The chapter argues that Ram should be understood as effectively the founder of an 'agrarian populist' ideological tradition in India, which pitched the small peasant proprietor against the urban money lender, was buttressed by Hindu jurisprudence plus the Raj's 'imperial populism' and expressed through distinctive stances on land reform, cooperatives and parliamentary democracy. However, while it is true that Ram stated in 1931 that he wished to see a 'Zamindar

²⁸ Ibid., 279-89.

²⁹ Jaffrelot and Tillin, 'Populism', 182.

³⁰ Peasant rule.

³¹ CR, 'Discussion on the Report of the Punjab Reforms Committee and On the Memoranda of the Punjab Government to the Indian Statutory Commission', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 434-5.

³² Kapila and Devji, *Political Thought in Action*; ix-xv; cf. Mark Bevir, 'Narrative as a Form of Explanation', *Disputatio*, 9, 1 (2000), 10-18; Agnibho Gangopadhyay, 'Biography of a Pseudonym', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2018), 15-19.

Government' formed at the centre of India,³³ his general loyalism to the Raj in the period c.1920-34 makes it difficult to strongly link him to subsequent 'agrarian populists', (see chapters 2-4), who were nationalists. Thus, this chapter will not describe Ram as the 'architect' of 'agrarian populism' in India,³⁴ but as the first major exponent of ideas and policies that would be developed further and used more effectively by others. Nevertheless, Ram's loyalism leads us towards one distinctive feature of 'agrarian populist' ideology in India which is that 'agrarian populism' in India was initially rather compatible with imperialism in contrast to other articulations of 'agrarian populist' ideology that have been advanced historically both within and outside India.

Secondly, the chapter also argues that Ram's new 'agrarian populist' ideology gained increasing traction by the late 1920s due to the need to respond to the spread of the worldwide economic depression to India. Indeed, the Great Depression severely affected Indian peasants because while their incomes were cut in half, debt service, rents and the revenue demand remained constant which conspired to severely disrupt access to credit and the agricultural markets.³⁵ While the crisis affected crops and regions unevenly across India, it provides crucial context for understanding how Ram's 'agrarian populist' ideology, initially British-sponsored, came to profoundly influence 1930s Punjab politics at a time when Congress was immersed in civil disobedience campaigning. Ram skilfully exploited these emergency conditions, leveraging British support for his Unionist Party allies to secure passage of the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act, which he would later use, among other Acts the Unionist Party later passed, to attack the Punjab Congress for the ambivalent stand it took towards his party's agrarian reform measures in the face of immense pressure placed upon it by organisations of urban Hindus opposed to the measure.³⁶

³³ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 199-200.

³⁴ Jaffrelot, *Silent Revolution*, 275; cf. Paul Wallace, 'Peasant Mobilization in India', *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 41, 4 (1980), 683-693.

³⁵ Dietmar Rothermund, *India in the Great Depression* (New Delhi, 1992), 79-80.

³⁶ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 290-2.

I: ‘The Improvement of Indian Village Life’? Chhotu Ram’s Emergence as a Peasant Leader, c.1881-1923

This section examines Chhotu Ram’s early career and shift from Congress to the Unionist Party, arguing that the latter was better suited as a vehicle for his emerging ‘agrarian populist’ ideals, which championed the ‘zamindar’ against the moneylender. His commitment to parliamentary politics, growing interest in rural development, and incompatibility with Gandhian *satyagraha* led him to work with the ‘imperial populist’ Punjab government rather than Indian Liberal parties (c.1919-23).

Ram was born in 1881 at Garhi Sampla village in Rohtak district, British Punjab.³⁷ Lying in south-east Punjab, he was therefore from a predominantly Hindu part of the province by contrast to Central Punjab and West Punjab³⁸ where Sikhs and Muslims preponderate respectively.³⁹ But like Punjab as a whole, Rohtak’s population was overwhelmingly rural with 82.03% of its population living in the countryside.⁴⁰ Furthermore, 58% of its population were agricultural ‘cultivators’, within which 35% were Hindu Jats, Chhotu Ram’s community.⁴¹ As Ram reflected in a speech of 1942 which he delivered to admirers and colleagues at a celebration of his sixty-first birthday:

I was born and brought up in rural surroundings which gave me a close and deep insight into the handicaps, difficulties, trials and tribulations of the rural population ... [which developed alongside] a deep and passionate love for the Jat tribe in which I was born.⁴²

Consequently, Ram says that, as early as 1897, an inspiring Sanskrit couplet from the

Hitopadesha,⁴³ led him to develop a ‘powerful passion for uplifting my tribe, educationally,

³⁷ Now in Haryana.

³⁸ Now in Pakistan.

³⁹ Kenneth W. Jones, ‘Communalism in the Punjab’, *JAS*, 28, 1 (1968), 40.

⁴⁰ *Report on the Census of the Panjáb Taken on the 17th of February 1881*, vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1883), 24.

⁴¹ *Gazetteer of the Rohtak District* (Calcutta, 1884?), 57.

⁴² ‘A Speech of Sir Chhotu Ram’, in *The Punjab Past and Present*, Vol. VIII, Part 1 [1942] (1974), 219.

⁴³ ‘With constant rounds to life decreed, both birth and death are no surprises, but truly born is he indeed, by whose birth his family rises’, in A. N. D. Haksar (trans.), *The Hitopadesa [Beneficial Advice]* [8th to 10th Century CE] (London, 2006), 5.

socially, economically and politically’, which ultimately resulted in him advancing the interests of the ‘exploited masses’ as a Unionist Party minister in the 1930s.⁴⁴

However, it is also true that Ram’s peasant caste was relatively privileged. Indeed, his own family were peasant proprietors who owned a landholding slightly smaller than 10 acres. But Ram’s father, who besides farming also lent money and engaged in small business, suffered major losses on account of a botched cotton deal, which forced him to take a loan from the village money lender with his debts passing onto Ram. This suggests that the family were squeezed financially.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the wealth of a peasant in Rohtak was influenced more by the amount of ‘agricultural capital’ they had access to, rather than the size of their holding, by 1881.⁴⁶ Nor did the agrarian economy’s prospects look very promising because agriculture in Rohtak was hampered by inadequate irrigation, poor rainfall and frequent floods and famines.⁴⁷ The agricultural situation was therefore very different in Rohtak, which lacked reliable irrigation resources, when compared to West Punjab, which had much of British India’s most developed canal irrigation infrastructure.⁴⁸

But ultimately, as Ram was a ‘surplus boy’, he was not required to work on the family farm. Instead, he was sent to school which his father hoped would result in him becoming a village *patwari*⁴⁹ or head constable on the advice of the village money lender who believed that basic education was sufficient for a Jat.⁵⁰ After all, the Jats, a predominantly Hindu peasant caste in south-east Punjab,⁵¹ and mainly Sikh in central Punjab, stood out among Indian peasants by their

⁴⁴ ‘Speech’, 219-20.

⁴⁵ Verma, *Chhotu Ram*, 33; Gopal, *Biography*, 11.

⁴⁶ Eric Stokes, ‘Northern and Central India’, in Dharma Kumar and Meghnad Desai (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1983), 65.

⁴⁷ Sir Malcolm Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* [1925] (London and New York, 1928), 92; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 19-21; Navtej Singh, *Starvation and Colonialism* (New Delhi, 1996), 81-127.

⁴⁸ Ian Stone, *Canal Irrigation in British India* (Cambridge, 1984), 13-16 and *passim*.

⁴⁹ Record keeper.

⁵⁰ Tika Ram, *Chhotu Ram*, 9.

⁵¹ Now Haryana.

tendency to personally work their farms with female relatives, despite often being prosperous and, by 1910, they were Rohtak's largest landed group who also lent money.⁵²

Nevertheless, after Ram excelled in his schoolwork, his uncle, who worked alongside his father, stepped in to support his education further through providing Rs. 40 for admission to a high school in Delhi. Additionally, Ram was fortunate to receive a 'freeship', approved by the school's headmaster, plus a scholarship of Rs. 6 per month on account of the excellent exam results he had achieved hitherto. This culminated in Ram winning a place at the highly elite St Stephen's College, University of Delhi, to study English and Sanskrit, which his uncle once again, and other family members, helped to finance but they could not provide full funding. However, Ram managed to secure additional funds from Sir Chhaju Ram Lamba (1861-1943), a wealthy Jat broker and philanthropist,⁵³ once at university.⁵⁴

As a student in Delhi, Ram first encountered Indian urbanites from 'the highly cultured sections of Delhi society'. Reflecting on his student days, Ram recalled that while he maintained 'cordial' relations with these students, this did not, however, prevent:

[F]riendly banter, [in which] these urban comrades always styled their school and college fellows from the countryside as rustics, clowns and bumpkins.⁵⁵

Therefore, he noted that while 'unpleasant heart-searchings' followed these experiences, they nevertheless reinforced the 'sapling planted in my heart by the couplet in the *Hitopadesha*'.⁵⁶ So, while his experiences in Delhi were important to the shaping of his character, Bajaj's claim, based on the source just quoted, that his student days in Delhi 'turned to be the basis of his political, economic and social ideas', is difficult to verify.⁵⁷

⁵² André Béteille, *Six Essays in Comparative Sociology* (New Delhi, 1974), 53; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 13-17, 63-4; Byres, 'Charan Singh', 142.

⁵³ Shiva N. Malik, *Seth Chhaju Ram* (Hisar, 1994), 15-70; cf. Datta, *Identity*, 53 and *passim*.

⁵⁴ According to Malik, Chhaju Ram was 'for Chhotu Ram, what His Highness, Shri Sayajirao Gaekwad, Maharaja of Baroda (1875-1939) proved to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956)'. Ambedkar was a seminal leader of India's 'untouchable' communities and the principal author of India's 1950 Constitution. Cf. *idem*, *Chhaju Ram*, 72.

⁵⁵ 'Speech', 220.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

⁵⁷ Bajaj, 'Chhotu Ram', 2, 2n7.

After his graduation in 1905, Ram was forced to drop out of an MA class for financial reasons.⁵⁸ Therefore, after seeing a job advert for a ‘graduate ... short-term “Assistant Private Secretaryship”, he began his career working for Rampal Singh (1849-1909), the Raja of Kalakankar and a *Taluqdar*⁵⁹ in Oudh who also served as a member of the British Legislative Council for the United Provinces.⁶⁰

The Raja, from estates north of Allahabad,⁶¹ had become estranged from his Rajput caste after marrying a European woman. Breaking family tradition of working with the colonial state, although his father had been killed for leading rebels against the British during the 1857-8 Mutiny, he helped found Congress in 1885 after returning to Kalakankar in 1884. On top of that, he also chaired the Allahabad Hindu Association to regain social standing, and launched the *Hindustan* journal, edited by Congress leader Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946), which, by 1889, promoted cow protection.⁶²

According to Gopal, Ram, who was offered the opportunity to write for the newspaper, managed to network with a variety of radical nationalist associates of the Raja, including Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950),⁶³ a highly influential nationalist thinker in Bengal who advocated a radical doctrine of ‘passive resistance’ during the *swadeshi*⁶⁴ movement in the province (1905-10), although Ghose did not rule out the use of violence to force the British out of India and had contacts with clandestine revolutionary cells, which erupted in opposition to Curzon’s partition of Bengal, officially for administrative reasons but mainly to curb rising nationalism and other political aims.⁶⁵ At this time, Gopal also asserts that Ram, under the influence of revolutionaries

⁵⁸ Tika Ram, *Chhotu Ram*, 10.

⁵⁹ Aristocratic landlord.

⁶⁰ Gopal, *Biography*, 22.

⁶¹ Now Prayagraj.

⁶² C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics* (Oxford, 1975), 71-2; John R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton, 1977), 307.

⁶³ Gopal, *Biography*, 22-3.

⁶⁴ Self-sufficiency.

⁶⁵ Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* (New Delhi, 1973), 9-30; David Hardiman, *The Nonviolent Struggle for Indian Freedom* (New York, 2019), 31-60.

like Ghose, believed that it was necessary to use force to remove the British from India although the Raja ultimately turned his attention towards ‘moderate or liberal’ politics.⁶⁶

A paucity of sources makes it difficult to judge the veracity of Gopal’s account and Ram only became a parliamentarian much later in 1923. Also, Verma suggests that Ram’s relationship with the Raja might not have been all that cordial as he eventually quit his role in reaction to an incident where he did not dine with him.⁶⁷

After leaving his post, Ram travelled to Agra where he went to see the Agra Fort, the Taj Mahal and the tomb of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) at Sikandra. At the latter, according to Verma,⁶⁸ a guide informed him that the Jat rulers of the Bharatpur⁶⁹ princely state (c.1722-1947) had once occupied the Agra Fort for several years following its capture by Suraj Mal (1707-63) in 1761,⁷⁰ who also had Akbar’s tomb desecrated as revenge for the Mughals’ execution of Gokula Jat in 1670 who had led the Jat uprising of 1669 against Emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707)’s fiscal and religious policies.⁷¹

Thus, Verma notes that Ram, inspired by the tale, considered working for the Maharaja of Bharatpur but he found the throne vacant - Ram Singh (1873-1929) had been removed, and a British-appointed council ruled instead.⁷² According to Gopal, the council would not countenance appointing Jats to significant positions.⁷³

While Gopal’s and Verma’s assertions are, again, difficult to assess due to limited sources, Ram did advocate for urgent administrative reform in Bharatpur state in 1918, attributing its poor governance to ‘negligence by the council’. He also called for greater Jat involvement in its administration, arguing the state needed people in key positions with a:

⁶⁶ Gopal, *Biography*, 23.

⁶⁷ Verma, *Chhotu Ram*, 41-2.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁹ Now in Rajasthan.

⁷⁰ K. Natwar Singh, *Maharaja Suraj Mal* (London, 1981), 94-6.

⁷¹ Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb* (Stanford, 2017), 37-88.

⁷² Verma, *Chhotu Ram*, 42.

⁷³ Gopal, *Biography*, 23.

[A] special attachment and love for the state, and who care for its welfare ... [and] such people can be none other than Jats.⁷⁴

Regardless, in the short term, Ram failed to find employment in the machinery of the state and so decided to resume his studies in law at Lahore College in March 1907.⁷⁵ Soon after arriving there, Ram learnt that St Stephen's College, his *alma mater*, had recently decided to launch a house magazine: *The Stephanian*. Responding to an invitation from C. F. Andrews (1871-1940), an Anglican missionary and teacher of philosophy at the college, Ram submitted an article for publication in the first issue of the magazine.⁷⁶

The resulting piece, 'The Improvement of Indian Village Life', published in April 1907,⁷⁷ was a sophisticated essay that argued powerfully that 'no progressive society can afford to allow such a large and important section [the peasantry] to remain stationary'.⁷⁸ It began with an observation that:

If we compare the India of to-day with the India of a century ago, we shall find ... a marvellous change ... a large-up-to-date town, such ... Calcutta⁷⁹ or Bombay,⁸⁰ may be taken as a type which illustrates this change at its highest point ... [because] if their old citizens were to come back from the dead, he would not be able to recognise his own native place ... [However,] the change in the country has been comparatively so inconsiderate that even if a remote village ancestor were to come to life again, he would feel quite at home in his old place of birth ... He would also discover many things which were altogether new, but he would notice a large number of things which were equally familiar to him.⁸¹

In order to ensure that positive aspects of rural life be maintained and bad aspects be eradicated, Ram therefore called for resources to be set aside to allow every peasant's daughter-in-law to live in a separate house from the main family with their husband and children and their 'joint stock'

⁷⁴ CR, 'Bharatpur Riyasat ke Shasan Prabandh mein Jaaton ki Bhageedari' ['Participation of Jats in the Governance of the Princely State of Bharatpur'], in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 69-70.

⁷⁵ Gopal, *Biography*, 23.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 23-4.

⁷⁷ 'Contents', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, v.

⁷⁸ CR, 'The Improvement of Indian Village Life', [1907] in K. C. Yadav (ed.), *The Crisis in India* (Kurukshetra, 1996), 72.

⁷⁹ Now Kolkata.

⁸⁰ Now Mumbai.

⁸¹ CR, 'Improvement', 71.

be managed in a more 'business-like way' in addition to more acceptance and recognition of 'individual responsibility and privilege.'⁸²

The reason Ram gave for this point, moreover, was that it would make village family life more 'modern' by weakening the 'old patriarchal system ... [where] the will of the eldest male member is law' while also retaining India's joint-family system, where multiple generations live together with their spouses and children in the same house, which, *inter alia*, Ram argued:

[T]eaches the wholesome lessons of obedience, discipline, patience, tact, forbearance, sympathy, sacrifice, and secure economy and does away with the necessity of poor laws.⁸³

In a similar spirit, Ram proposed several reforms to the 'structure of the village society' via 'official recognition' and 'encouragement' of the village *panchayat*⁸⁴ with the caveat that its members be elected and its powers more clearly and 'officially' defined. While the piece does not fully clarify how Ram believed this would make Indian village life more harmonious, it can be inferred from his criticism of the 'heavy punishments' sometimes imposed by these bodies on members of 'menial classes' - such as barbers and likely 'untouchable' by caste - including village exile in response to a 'serious offence against morality', without reference to the law, that such changes would make decisions more legitimate and just.⁸⁵

This minor flaw aside, Ram's description of the village structure, composed of peasant proprietors, artisans, 'menial classes', priests and money lenders, is most interesting for its characterisation of the latter group. Indeed, Ram described the village money lender as 'the incarnation of Shylock in our own times'.⁸⁶ This striking phrase reveals Ram's emerging 'agrarian populist' tendencies, with the money lender (*bania*) later becoming the primary 'elite' antagonist against whom he would frame his politics.

⁸² Ibid., 72-3.

⁸³ Ibid., 73-4.

⁸⁴ Council.

⁸⁵ CR, 'Improvement', 75.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 74.

However, since Ram's 1907 piece was not explicitly political, it cannot be said to fully articulate an ideology.⁸⁷ This can be clearly seen in that, following Ram's description of village society structures, he went on to advocate, *inter alia*, the spread of education, 'spiritual, moral and intellectual', to eradicate the 'ignorance and superstition' of the Indian village.⁸⁸ Hence his concluding point that 'the most effective remedy', for India's villages, was 'the placing of ... elementary education within reach of all.'⁸⁹

In the short term, however, Ram's own education was disrupted by the 1907 Lahore plague, forcing his return to Kalakankar as the Raja's Private Secretary. Nevertheless, his article had impressed C. F. Andrews, who shared it with Sir Robert Carlyle (1859-1934) then Finance Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council, leading to a promised but ultimately unsuccessful job interview with Punjab's Financial Commissioner.⁹⁰ In response, Ram therefore resumed his legal studies at St John's College, Agra, funding it by teaching locally alongside generous contributions from Chhaju Ram once more.⁹¹ As a student, he also closely studied conditions in Agra and Meerut divisions, strengthening his resolve to improve the plight of Jats.⁹² Then, after securing his law degree in 1911 from the University of Allahabad, Ram qualified as a lawyer on 17 July.⁹³ Soon after, he returned to Rohtak where he built up his practice from the autumn of 1912.⁹⁴

After returning to Rohtak, Ram started paying more attention to politics.⁹⁵ As he recounts in his 1942 speech:

A band of ardent workers, consisting mostly of Arya Samajists, with the notable exception of ... Lal Chand ... was ready at hand ... [thus] a vigorous campaign was started ... to awaken the Jats from their lethargy.⁹⁶

⁸⁷ Cf. Jaffrelot, *Silent Revolution*, 276.

⁸⁸ CR, 'Improvement', 75-6.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁹⁰ Gopal, *Biography*, 23-4, 30.

⁹¹ Ibid., 30-1; cf. Malik, *Chhaju Ram*, 72.

⁹² 'Speech', 220.

⁹³ CR, 'Early Days', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 10.

⁹⁴ 'Speech', 220.

⁹⁵ Tika Ram, *Chhotu Ram*, 11.

⁹⁶ 'Speech', 220.

The Arya Samaj (AS),⁹⁷ a Hindu religious revivalist movement founded in 1875 to make the faith more monotheistic and Vedas-rooted, had been active in Rohtak since the 1880s, had managed to win some 30,000 Hindu Jat followers by 1911 in south-east Punjab.⁹⁸ Lal Chand, moreover, had become Ram's legal partner in February 1913. He was, unlike Ram who had been a committed believer of AS doctrine at least since his student days,⁹⁹ a follower of the 'traditional Sanatan Dharma.'¹⁰⁰

While the Ram-Chand partnership was an unexpected alliance, it becomes easier to understand when we consider Chand's concern that the LAA passed in 1900 to restrict the passage of agricultural land from 'agriculturist' to 'non-agriculturist' tribes, especially from indebted Muslim peasants to urban Hindu money lenders,¹⁰¹ and which defined an 'agriculturist' as a person who 'held' land either as a proprietor or a tenant, although in practice with reference to specific castes by local governments,¹⁰² was increasingly pushing Hindus, 'the sons of the soil and its most ancient inhabitants', away from agriculture and into British dominated professions. The reason Chand gave for this was that district officials were unfairly ascribing 'agricultural tribe' to the 'higher castes' of Muslims (e.g. Pathans) and not to the 'higher castes' of Hindus (e.g. Brahmins) which meant that the latter could no longer purchase land.¹⁰³

Furthermore, Chand, who was a founding member of the right-wing, Hindu nationalist, Punjabi Hindu Sabha party in 1909, the initial impetus for its organisation being the Punjab government's closing of a key loophole in the LAA in 1907 which had allowed wealthy urban Hindus to continue to purchase land, was terrified at the prospect of Hindus becoming a minority, which they already were in Muslim majority Punjab, in India overall. As a result, he had

⁹⁷ Aryan Society.

⁹⁸ Datta *Identity*, 59, 71.

⁹⁹ Gopal, *Biography*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 33. *Sanatan Dharma* translates as 'eternal religion.'

¹⁰¹ M. Mufakharul Islam, 'The Punjab Land Alienation Act and the Professional Moneylenders', *MLAS*, 29, 2 (1995), 271-2, 272n2.

¹⁰² Gil, *Labors of Division*, 105-6ff.

¹⁰³ Lal Chand, *Self-Abnegation in Politics* [1909] (Lahore, 1938), 4, 30-4.

grown very hostile to Congress who he felt had failed to properly advance the rights of the Hindu community since its foundation in 1885.¹⁰⁴

Regarding whether Ram held similar views, sources are again insufficient for definitive assessment. However, Bhardwaj claims that in his early Rohtak years, Ram was:

[A]mazed at the preponderance of Muslim officers in ... [the] district ... [and] he even opposed the Land Alienation Act because he thought it was meant to strangle the Hindus.¹⁰⁵

But, in the long term, Ram became a staunch defender of the LAA as a stalwart of the largely Muslim Unionist Party, a leading figure from which described the legislation as its 'Magna Carta' in 1929.¹⁰⁶ But with Ram's support, Chand was accepted as a Jat leader,¹⁰⁷ and the pair quickly made efforts towards promoting the community's interests.¹⁰⁸

Despite this, Ram's and Chand's efforts were rudely interrupted by the outbreak of WWI. Although Ram noticed that it provided further opportunities for advancing Jats. Thus, he started encouraging them to join the military after becoming Honorary Secretary of the Rohtak District Recruitment Committee.¹⁰⁹ On 11 March 1915, he called on Punjab's 'young men to avail of this opportunity to join the Indian army'. Promising 'good clothes and good food', Ram stressed service as a 'respectable calling' because 'we are Kshatriyas.'¹¹⁰

The latter point was surely a reference to an influential discourse, preached by Jat Arya Samajists, that their community did not come from the lower orders of the caste hierarchy or from the indigenous communities of India, as some colonial ethnographers had argued, but was rather a warrior (*kshatriya*) caste.¹¹¹ Thus, Chhotu Ram's *Jat Gazette (JG)*, which he founded in 1916 to assert the rights of 'the Jat community' and personally edited until 1924,¹¹² actively

¹⁰⁴ Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 13-15; cf. Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India* (London, 2013), 16-18.

¹⁰⁵ M. L. Bhardwaj, 'Sir Chhotu Ram', in N. B. Sen (ed.), *Punjab's Eminent Hindus* (Lahore, 1943), 16.

¹⁰⁶ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 236; Gilmartin, *Empire*, 38.

¹⁰⁷ Gopal, *Biography*, 33.

¹⁰⁸ 'Speech', 221.

¹⁰⁹ Gopal, *Biography*, 37.

¹¹⁰ CR, 'Appeal to Young Men', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 11. A *Kshatriya* (warrior) ranks only below the Brahmin in the *varna* (caste) hierarchy.

¹¹¹ Datta, *Identity*, 77-9.

¹¹² Chowdhry, *Politics*, 42.

promoted the Jat claim to martial origins, particularly from 1917-18,¹¹³ by publishing, in Misra's words, 'colourful and highly imaginative 'histories' of Jat 'tribal' loyalty to the Raj.'¹¹⁴

In a *JG* article dated 3 April 1918, Ram therefore responded to British Prime Minister David Lloyd George (1863-1945)'s recent appeal to Viceroy Chelmsford (1868-1933) for additional troops by arguing that everyone available had an 'obligation' to enlist, since British defeat would jeopardise the 'peace, progress, and prosperity' that included railway development, educational expansion and British-administered courts,¹¹⁵ and return India to:

[T]he terrifying days of disorder from the mid-nineteenth century will return, when ... this country was trapped in chaos.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, in a *JG* article dated 7 January 1920, and thus admittedly after the war, Ram emphasised that Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), the Sikh Emperor who ruled Punjab from 1801-1839, was himself from a Sikh Jat family and that his:

[S]word struck fear in Kabul and Kandahar¹¹⁷ ... and ... [he] desired friendship with the British rather than conflict.¹¹⁸

What is more, Ram's strong commitment to support AS members who subsequently joined the army can also be seen in his efforts to publicise the case of a member who was asked to remove his sacred thread as a requirement for enlistment in May 1917.¹¹⁹ This issue would have been highly sensitive given the recent history of a British colonel, in a context where the authorities were generally suspicious of the AS which they believed was encouraging sedition among Jats and that their claims of enhanced status for the community had the potential to cause social and political unrest, banning Jat recruits from wearing the sacred thread in 1911.¹²⁰

¹¹³ Datta, *Identity*, 79ns192-3.

¹¹⁴ Misra, *VCT*, 89.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 5, 18, 20-3 and *passim*.

¹¹⁶ CR, '*Rangarooton ki Bharte ke Silasile mein Hamare Jimmedaree*' ['Our Responsibility in Connection with the Recruitment of Soldiers'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 70-1; cf. Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed* (Oxford, 1986).

¹¹⁷ Kabul and Kandahar are now in Afghanistan.

¹¹⁸ CR, '*Jat Kaum ki Bhootakaalin Gaurvapoorn Itihaas Vartaman Patan ki Tulana*' ['A Comparison of the Glorious History of the Jat Community with its Present Degeneration'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 93; cf. Priya Atwal, *Royals and Rebels* (London, 2020), 1-124.

¹¹⁹ CR, 'On the Enlistment of Arya Samajists in the Army', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 12-13.

¹²⁰ Datta *Identity*, 63-4.

It is unclear if Ram was aware of this history, but he nevertheless declared the re-emergence of British stipulations regarding the non-wearing of the sacred thread in 1917 as ‘manifestly unfair and unjust’ and ‘made representations’ to ‘some of the leading and influential recruiters’ to abolish them.¹²¹ More broadly, Ram also, in an article for the *JG* dated 9 July 1918, strongly praised the AS because the:

[P]ropaganda ... and ... inspiring speeches of its leaders awakened a sense of community pride among the Jats ... They remained committed to the work of community welfare and improvement ... As a result, among the Jats, a sense of community pride ... emerged ... schools were opened ... meetings were organised ... The traditions, customs ... of the Jat community and their focus on their own institutions began to grow daily in importance ...¹²²

But despite his challenging of imperial authority on behalf of Arya Samajists, when necessary, Ram’s wartime behaviour remained within a broader policy of collaboration and support for the British war effort. This aligns with the remarkably diverse array of Indian voices supporting military enlistment during WWI, which includes Gandhi despite his famous commitment to non-violence.¹²³ Also, Ram’s approach was in line with official Congress policy, and he had himself joined it in February 1914 before assuming the Presidency of the Rohtak District Congress Committee in 1916.¹²⁴

Ram’s rationale for joining Congress - although his precise motivations are difficult to assess given this account derives from his 1942 speech - was that organising ‘agricultural classes’ on economic lines would:

[S]ecure the common benefit of the largest section of the poor and down-trodden including Jats. Thus organised, they will also serve as the vanguard, as the champions, of all-exploited classes. The organisation of agricultural classes, through sectarian logically, will serve the interests of nationalism and no less than those of ... sectionalism.¹²⁵

¹²¹ CR, ‘Arya Samajists’, 12.

¹²² CR, ‘*Jat aur Gair Jat Aryasamaji*’ [‘Jats and Non-Jat Arya Samajists’] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 75.

¹²³ Robert E. Upton, ‘It Gives Us a Power and Strength Which We Do Not Possess’, *MAS*, 52, 6 (2018), 1977-2012.

¹²⁴ Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 11n3; ‘Sir Chhotu Ram: 1881-1945’, in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, xxxi; Tika Ram, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, 12n2.

¹²⁵ ‘Speech’, 222.

However, although without a clear rationale, Ram also argued that educated Jats, aware of political consequences, should join Congress but warned the Jat community against associating with the party wholesale.¹²⁶ Regardless, his argument failed to entirely convince his followers given Ram's own concession that they were not popular with Arya Samaj leaders, who had been heavily influenced by the Punjabi Congress leader and fellow Arya Samajist Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928),¹²⁷ and even Bengali revolutionaries between 1903 and 1910.¹²⁸ They were also suspicious that he was trying to isolate Jats, many of whom supported Congress,¹²⁹ from the wider Hindu community, which the AS had tried to mobilise especially through cow protection campaigns.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, a strong response among the Jats was the most powerful justification available to Ram for his/the Congress' policy of encouraging military enlistment. The number of recruits from Rohtak increased from 6,245 to 22,144 between January 1915 and November 1918, the third highest number among Punjab's districts, which meant that, by 1918, 23.9% of Rohtak's men of military age had enlisted.¹³¹ Of these, roughly 50% were from the Jat caste.¹³²

The Punjab Government, meanwhile, was so impressed with Ram's efforts that it announced in 1915 that the Ambala Division's agricultural communities would have their interests strongly considered in future bureaucratic appointments.¹³³ The All-India Jat Mahasabha, a caste association founded in 1905 by 'some leaders from the United Provinces and well-wishers of the [Jat] community',¹³⁴ which Ram would later serve as secretary of in 1913,¹³⁵ then put pressure on it to keep its promise. In 1916, the organisation submitted a memorandum to Michael O'Dwyer

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Vanya Vaidehi Bhargav, *Being Hindu, Being Indian* (Haryana, 2024), ch. 1.

¹²⁸ Datta, *Identity*, 62.

¹²⁹ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 126.

¹³⁰ 'Speech', 222 cf. Jones, 'Communalism', 43n14, 45-6; Peter Robb, 'The Challenge of Gau Mata', *MAS*, 20, 2 (1986), 292-3ff.

¹³¹ M. S. Leigh, *Punjab and the War* (Lahore, 1922), 59, 61.

¹³² Chowdhry, *Politics*, 31.

¹³³ Gopal, *Biography*, 37.

¹³⁴ CR, 'Meerut mein Jat Mahasabha ki Vishal Sabha' ['The Grand Assembly of the Jat Mahasabha in Meerut'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 31.

¹³⁵ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 41-2.

(1864-1940), Punjab's Lieutenant Governor, that attempted to justify more jobs for the community by stressing its loyalty during the Indian Rebellion of 1857-8.¹³⁶

Furthermore, O'Dwyer partly responded to these demands by reserving two-thirds of Lyallpur Agricultural College vacancies for rural men in 1916, a move unpopular with the urban educated classes but which, to him, laid the foundation for strong cooperation between the department and rural population.¹³⁷ Such a response was to be expected as O'Dwyer was an administrator steeped in the authoritarian paternalist ideology of the 'Punjab School', which prioritised imperial security and fostering prosperity for the peasantry.¹³⁸

Ram himself also did very well out of the war given that the authorities gave him a title and a grant of 100 acres of irrigated Crown land at Montgomery in West Punjab.¹³⁹ Although, he did say that his recruitment work was primarily motivated out of his:

[T]hought [that] I would ... ensure that the Indian people would become strong and not succumb to another foreign power.¹⁴⁰

But, following the conclusion of the war, however, Ram's twin commitment to working with Congress and the Punjab Government came under immense strain. On 16 April 1919, H. A. Casson (1867-1952), the Commissioner for Ambala, wrote to Lal Chand to rebuke him for failing to reign in Ram who, he alleged, had been participating in Congress agitations against the Rowlatt Act.¹⁴¹ The Rowlatt Act, passed in March 1919, had recently provided the British Raj with new, far-reaching powers to crack down on political dissent following an alarmist report regarding the growth of revolutionary conspiracies across India intent on overthrowing the Raj.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Datta, *Identity*, 76-7.

¹³⁷ Michael O'Dwyer, *India As I Knew It* (London, 1925), 253.

¹³⁸ Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959), 243-5; Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1995), 38-9, 227-9; Mark Condos, *The Insecurity State* (Cambridge, 2017), 9-10 and *passim*.

¹³⁹ Tika Ram, *Chhotu Ram*, 12; Imran Ali, *The Punjab Under Imperialism* (Princeton, 1988), 14-18; Yong, *Garrison State*, 133.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Gopal, *Biography*, 38.

¹⁴¹ 'Letter from H. A. Casson', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 17-18.

¹⁴² *Sedition Committee* (Calcutta, 1918).

On Punjab specifically, official concern centred on the *Ghadar*¹⁴³ Movement (1913-1948).¹⁴⁴ The colonial state had repressed one of its major attempts at armed insurrection in 1915 through the Lahore conspiracy trials, which led to the execution of 28 ‘conspirators’.¹⁴⁵ Hence the report’s assertion that:

[T]he *Ghadr* movement in the Punjab came within an ace of causing widespread bloodshed ... [and] had not Government been armed with extensive powers¹⁴⁶ ... the *Ghadr* movement could not have been suppressed so rapidly.¹⁴⁷

Such arguments were used to justify the Rowlatt Act’s enabling of the government to try ‘seditious crimes’ by judges without juries and take security from suspects among many further repressive powers.¹⁴⁸ In response, Gandhi declared he would oppose the ‘devilish legislation’ through *satyagraha*. The result was a massive *bartal*¹⁴⁹ on 6 April.¹⁵⁰

In Rohtak district, meanwhile, local agitations against the Rowlatt Act ‘led to no serious disturbance’ however they ‘provided a considerable tension of feeling’ and spread ‘in part’ to rural areas. By contrast, in Rohtak town, ‘there was a complete closure of shops’ on 6 April and a ‘mass meeting’ on 11 April where the sale of ‘proscribed literature’ was endorsed.¹⁵¹ In this context, Casson opened his letter of 16 April to Chand by asserting that his:

[P]artner ... was a member of the joint meeting of citizens, which decided on passive resistance and publication of forbidden literature.¹⁵²

It is difficult to judge the accuracy of Casson’s claims but one scholar says that Ram chaired a meeting at Gaukaran Tank, Rohtak on 11 April where the sale of proscribed literature and passive resistance had indeed been advocated.¹⁵³ Also, Ram allegedly declined an opportunity

¹⁴³ Mutiny.

¹⁴⁴ Tim Harper, *Underground Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 2021), 184-7 and *passim*.

¹⁴⁵ *Sedition Committee*, 153-60.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. Imprisonment without trial as enabled by the Defence of India Act, 1915.

¹⁴⁷ *Sedition Committee*, 161.

¹⁴⁸ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi’s Rise to Power* (Cambridge, 1972), 161.

¹⁴⁹ Strike.

¹⁵⁰ Brown, *Power*, 163-71ff; cf. Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi* (London, 2018), 74-81.

¹⁵¹ ‘Disorders Inquiry Committee’ in V. N. Datta (ed.), *New Light on the Punjab Disturbances in 1919*, vol. 1 (Simla, 1975), 335-6.

¹⁵² ‘Letter from H. A. Casson’, 17.

¹⁵³ Hari Singh, ‘Nationalist Politics and Rowlatt Satyagraha in Rohtak District’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 55 (1994), 518-19.

presented to him by Chand to support the British by promoting a 'loyal manifesto' he had recently published.¹⁵⁴ Thus, R. C. Bolster (1878-1936), the Deputy Commissioner for Rohtak, had recently recommended, albeit unsuccessfully, that Chhotu Ram be deported from Punjab,¹⁵⁵ and was seeking to prosecute him for sedition.¹⁵⁶

Casson's letter of 16 April is therefore best understood as an expression of his outrage at Ram's actions. After all, he had:

[J]ust come from - Montgomery after going there to receive from Government a large grant of land ... [and could not] accept gifts from Government with one hand while endeavouring to strike Government with the other.¹⁵⁷

Responding to pressure from Casson and Bolster, Ram wrote to the latter on 19 April, stating that he was not aware of the precise intelligence held by the authorities and that he had 'a host of enemies' including within the police, whom he presumably blamed for the claims.¹⁵⁸ In a follow-up letter dated 20 April, Ram also asserted that he had:

[N]ever associated myself with either passive resistance or Satyagraha ... [and] was ... against hartals ... [therefore] my influence will be at your disposal now as it had been at the disposal of the Government during the war.¹⁵⁹

In his reply to Casson's letter of 16 April, moreover, which reached him on 26 April, Ram said that he had never supported 'passive resistance and Satyagraha' because 'any disobedience to the laws of the country' was effectively a redline for him in matters of principle. Regarding the meeting of 11 April where Ram had been accused of endorsing the distribution of proscribed literature and passive resistance, Ram contended that it had, in fact, concluded that 'there should be no Hartal or demonstration.'¹⁶⁰

Ram's letters appear to have effectively reassured Casson and Bolster as the latter subsequently informed the former that he had told Ram that:

¹⁵⁴ 'Disorders', 336; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 167.

¹⁵⁵ Bajaj, 'Chhotu Ram', 6n26.

¹⁵⁶ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 167-8.

¹⁵⁷ 'Letter from H. A. Casson', 17.

¹⁵⁸ 'Letter to R. C. Bolster', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 19.

¹⁵⁹ 'Letter to R. C. Bolster', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 20-1.

¹⁶⁰ 'Letter to Commissioner', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 21-2.

[W]hatever happened during the disturbances of 1919 may be wiped out and that for the future he has ample opportunities of proving his loyalty and of performing ... services on behalf of Government.¹⁶¹

Although in a letter to Bolster dated 29 April, Casson placed renewed stress on the 'gifts' recently awarded to Ram alongside an acid remark that:

[I]f his conduct has not been satisfactory, His Honour is quite prepared to confiscate both the grant and the title.¹⁶²

British officials were therefore keeping a close eye on Ram. In May 1919, a further document was produced regarding his work as a legal advisor to Piru Singh, the manager of a *gurukul*¹⁶³ at Mathindu which taught Jat boys Sanskrit and was heavily invested in AS ideology,¹⁶⁴ alongside his links to other 'Rohtak extremists'.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, the *gurukul* had brought Ram into the orbit of Swami Shraddhanand (1856-1926), another leading Punjabi Arya Samajist and anti-Rowlatt agitator.¹⁶⁶ Such links are significant given a more general truth that Punjabi Arya Samajists tended to strongly support passive resistance. Thus, in due course, they became strong supporters of Gandhi's next planned campaign of anti-colonial civil disobedience, the Non-Cooperation movement of 1920-22.¹⁶⁷

The Non-Cooperation movement, which sought to build on the momentum established during the Rowlatt *satyagraha* and Gandhi's recent efforts to mobilise Indian Muslims in reaction to British plans to dismantle the Ottoman Empire (c.1299-1922) post WWI,¹⁶⁸ was the party's first campaign to have a truly national character.¹⁶⁹ It encouraged Indians to resign their titles, boycott government law courts, legislative councils, schools and colleges, encourage *swadeshi* through buying Indian goods, among other sub-campaigns including non-payment of taxes by

¹⁶¹ Bolster to Casson (n. d.), Ram Singh Jakhar Papers, PMML, Inst. III-VIII, II, S. No. 1, 16.

¹⁶² Casson to Bolster, (29/04/19), Ram Singh Jakhar Papers, PMML, Inst. III-VIII, II, S. No. 1.

¹⁶³ School.

¹⁶⁴ Datta, *Identity*, 81.

¹⁶⁵ 'Further Note Regarding the Political Activities of ... Chhotu Ram', (25/5/19), Ram Singh Jakhar Papers, PMML, Inst. III – VIII, II, S No. 1, 15.

¹⁶⁶ Datta, *Identity*, 92.

¹⁶⁷ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 126-7.

¹⁶⁸ Brown, *Power*, 190ff, 230ff, 251ff.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 307ff.

November 1921.¹⁷⁰ Overall, it was generally non-violent in nature and found support in most Indian provinces and from a wide variety of social classes and religious communities.¹⁷¹

While the Non-Cooperation campaign found considerable support in Punjab,¹⁷² Ram opposed it from the beginning. In an article for the *JG* dated 23 June 1920, Ram denounced it, especially Gandhi's suggestions that Indians resign from government jobs and refuse to pay taxes, for being tantamount to a 'rebellion' which would result in 'trouble, punishment, calamity and destruction'.¹⁷³ On 18 August, by which time the Non-Cooperation movement had officially begun, he then expressed his dismay that the principle of *swadeshi* drives, which he supported, was being conflated with Non-Cooperation. At the same time, he observed that 'all other ... programmes to promote progress' had been dismissed, which was 'completely impractical'.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, in the same piece, Ram also pointed out that while many Congress leaders supported Non-Cooperation, other 'influential and popular leaders' were opposed to it,¹⁷⁵ especially C. R. Das (1870-1925), an influential Bengali Congressman, who initially criticised the movement but later lent support to it,¹⁷⁶ Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925), who in 1919 was one of the founders of the Indian National Liberation Federation,¹⁷⁷ and Annie Besant (1847-1933), a radical British theosophist, independence activist and former President of Congress,¹⁷⁸ among others.¹⁷⁹

Ram's objection to the Non-Cooperation movement was thus fundamentally that it was 'idealistic, rather than practical', as he made clear in a September 1920 *JG* article. While some 'sacrifice' was needed for Indian freedom, Ram argued that Indian elites ('a small number of

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 264, 308-315ff, 350.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 317-30; David Hardiman, *Noncooperation in India* (London, 2021), 1 and *passim*.

¹⁷² Brown, *Power*, 325; Yashpal Singh, 'Contribution of Haryana in Non-Cooperation Movement', *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 8, 1 (2023), 81-2.

¹⁷³ CR, '*Asahyog Andolan*' ['The Non-Cooperation Movement'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 159-62.

¹⁷⁴ CR '*Asahyog* (2)' ['Non-cooperation (2)'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 186.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Prithwis Chandra Ray, *Life & Times of C. R. Das* (London, 1927), 159ff.

¹⁷⁷ Ray T. Smith, 'The Role of India's 'Liberals' in the Nationalist Movement', *Asian Survey (AS)*, 8, 7 (1968), 607-8, 612-13.

¹⁷⁸ Brown, *Power*, 275 and *passim*.

¹⁷⁹ CR, '*Asahyog* (2)', 186.

educated people') could afford to resign their titles, but abandoning 'government jobs' - including his own legal profession - and school places was different. After all, since the British government financed approximately 50,000 schools and colleges, which educated 'millions of students', such action risked destroying 'the foundation of our country's education'.¹⁸⁰ As a result, following the approval of the Non-Cooperation campaign by the Punjab Congress in November 1920,¹⁸¹ Ram resigned from it.¹⁸²

In the short term, Ram's arguments proved rather prescient, especially his points about the Non-Cooperation campaign's potentially destructive nature. In February 1922, Gandhi was forced to prematurely end it in response to a serious outbreak of violence, namely the massacre of twenty-two British police officers in Chauri Chaura, UP by peasant protestors in February 1922.¹⁸³ Ram's explanation for its failure can thus be found in a 1924 letter to Henry Harcourt (1873-1933), the Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak from 1914-19, whom he had worked with closely during WWI.¹⁸⁴

In this letter, however, Ram did not explicitly mention Chauri Chaura and he pushed back against Harcourt's description of Gandhi as a 'mischievous madman' when he praised him as 'an almost perfect character' whose 'popularity and influence' was down to 'the saintliness of his character' in addition to the 'noble cause which he has espoused'.¹⁸⁵ This was despite his own ridiculing of Gandhi back in 1921 when he described the spinning of cotton via the *charkha*,¹⁸⁶ promoted by Gandhi, as an 'unmanly' exercise which would effectively turn a 'Jat into a *Julaba*.'¹⁸⁷

Furthermore, Ram went as far as arguing that if anyone other than Gandhi had claimed 'the *charkha* to be the ultimate mantra¹⁸⁸ of Swaraj ... people would send them to a mental asylum'

¹⁸⁰ CR, 'Asahyog (3)' ['Non-Cooperation (3)'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 189-90.

¹⁸¹ CR, 'Rohtak Conference - I', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 41-5; idem, 'Rohtak Conference - II', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 45-9; 'Rohtak Conference - III', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 49-52.

¹⁸² 'Chhotu Ram: 1881-1945', xxxiii.

¹⁸³ Brown, *Power*, 328, 336, 342; Amin, *Event*, 12-18; Guha, *Gandhi*, 155-7.

¹⁸⁴ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 165-7.

¹⁸⁵ Henry Harcourt, *Sidelights on the Crisis in India* (London, 1924), 33, 39.

¹⁸⁶ Spinning wheel.

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Chowdhry, *Politics*, 146n11. The *Julabas* are a weaving caste.

¹⁸⁸ A sound in this context.

because if everyone took to spinning, as Gandhi had suggested, there would be no one available to grow food or produce cotton.¹⁸⁹ Although Ram, as stated plausibly by Chowdhry given he was briefly a Congressman, although without clear evidence, did nevertheless claim to have sympathy with Congress stances on rural development, *panchayats*, *swadeshi* and anti-untouchable discrimination campaigns. Additionally, he also donned *khaddar*¹⁹⁰ until c.1924.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, in his key letter to Harcourt also of that year, Ram now argued that Gandhi's fundamental error lay:

[I]n the judging of human nature ... non-violence in thought, word or deed ... is difficult of attainment ... [because] it requires men to develop the qualities of angels.¹⁹²

We should, however, avoid an uncritical acceptance of this case. After all, there were also material considerations motivating Ram's opposition to Non-Cooperation and its implications for the interests of his Jat followers as there is considerable evidence that he believed that if Punjabi cultivators participated in its no-tax campaigns, their lands would be confiscated by the government and sold on to members of money lending castes. Thus, he warned that 'for the non-payment of land revenue ... the farmer could be deprived of all his lands.'¹⁹³

Concern for the implications of Non-Cooperation for the landed peasantry, not a philosophical objection to Non-Cooperation, therefore, appears to be the primary reason for Ram's 1920 Congress resignation. However, it was also motivated by a commitment to constitutionalism and parliamentary democracy, which his 'agrarian populist' ideology, rooted in championing 'zamindar' interests against money lenders, would be expressed through more fully in the 1920s. Thus, in his 1924 letter to Harcourt, Ram argued that while he could support the use of *satyagraha* against the Government of India if the conditions were right, he did not believe that current political conditions warranted adopting such a strategy because none of the following then applied to India:

¹⁸⁹ CR, '*Charkha ki Awaaz mein Swarajya ka Mantra*' ['The Mantra of Freedom in the Sound of the Spinning Wheel'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 263.

¹⁹⁰ Hand-woven cloth.

¹⁹¹ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 144-5, 144-5n6.

¹⁹² Harcourt, *Sidelights*, 40.

¹⁹³ Bajaj, 'Chhotu Ram', 7-8.

Firstly, all hope of justice from the foreign Government must have ceased. Secondly, in the event of a conflict with the ruling race we must have at least equal chances of success. Thirdly, when we have fought out the ruling race successfully, we must be in a position to maintain internal order and to ward off external aggression.¹⁹⁴

Thus, Ram concluded:

[T]he only alternative to our present political status, except through constitutional advance, was anarchy, and consequently I not only refused to subscribe to the cult of non-co-operation, but actually opposed it.¹⁹⁵

Indeed, it is important to prioritise Ram's objections to Congress tactics on these grounds,¹⁹⁶ because before Congress decided to embark on a collision course with the government, a more constitutionally sound political option was being fostered for Indian leaders.

In December 1919, Westminster passed the Government of India Act of 1919, the invention of Viscount Chelmsford and Edwin Montagu (1879-1924), then Viceroy of India and Secretary of State for India. These reforms, designed to reward Indian nationalists for the support they had mobilised for the British war effort,¹⁹⁷ broadened the scope of the Indian Councils Act, 1909 that had provided minority communities in India with separate electoral representation,¹⁹⁸ and split certain governmental powers between the centre and the provinces. Thus, provincial governments and legislatures, composed of British and Indian members appointed by the provincial Governor, became responsible for policy areas such as education, public health, public works and agriculture while central government retained control over military, revenue and foreign policy.¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, the Act expanded the franchise to about 3% of the adult population and increased the size of the provincial legislatures.²⁰⁰ In Punjab, the franchise was based on strict

¹⁹⁴ Harcourt, *Sidelights*, 39.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Chowdhry, *Politics*, 144-5.

¹⁹⁷ S. R. Mehrotra, 'The Politics Behind the Montagu Declaration of 1917', in C. H. Phillips (ed.), *Politics and Society in India* (London, 1963), 79-81ff.

¹⁹⁸ Tejani, *Secularism*, 116-143.

¹⁹⁹ Durba Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists* (Cambridge, 2017), 28-9.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 29n6; Tanwar, *Power*, 29.

property ownership and income qualifications,²⁰¹ like paying more than Rs. 25 in land revenue to qualify as a voter,²⁰² which was largely due to the conservatism of O'Dwyer who, if he had not been ordered to do so by his superiors, would not have introduced any reform at all in favour of supplying further patronage to his government's rural allies.²⁰³

O'Dwyer's influence therefore ensured that prospective parliamentary candidates of urban origin had to prove that they had lived in a rural area for four years before being allowed to stand for election there.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, separate electorates were created for Punjab's rural and urban areas relative to their weightings in the overall population.²⁰⁵ The implication was that, for example, only 4/34 of the seats in the PLC reserved for Muslims would go to members from this community representing urban areas.²⁰⁶

The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms in Punjab, when combined with an October 1919 resolution reserving 50-90% of government jobs for the rural community,²⁰⁷ were therefore an intoxicating development for the aspiring agrarian constitutionalist politician. In March 1920, Ram expressed strong support for the Reforms, believing they would ensure rural representatives keep pace with urban ones in serving the nation without losing 'balance of mind' or 'sobriety of judgment.'²⁰⁸

Ram was, however, not the only politician who saw an opportunity in the Reforms. Fazl-i-Husain (1877-1936), a Muslim lawyer of urban origin as the son of a revenue officer,²⁰⁹ who had also recently quit Congress in reaction to the Non-Cooperation campaign out of concern

²⁰¹ Craig Baxter, 'The People's Party Vs. The Punjab "Feudalists"', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 8, 3-4 (1973), 167.

²⁰² Ayesha Jalal and Anil Seal, 'Alternative to Partition', *MAS*, 15, 3 (1981), 425n19.

²⁰³ David Page, *Prelude to Partition* (New Delhi and New York, 1982), 52-7; Nick Lloyd, 'Sir Michael O'Dwyer and 'Imperial Terrorism' in the Punjab', *South Asia*, 33, 3 (2010), 365-6.

²⁰⁴ Jalal and Seal, 'Alternative', 425.

²⁰⁵ Talbot, 'Collaborators', 77.

²⁰⁶ Page, *Partition*, 47.

²⁰⁷ 'Resolution of 1919', in Nath, *Memorandum*, 170-77.

²⁰⁸ CR, 'Supports the Reform Act of 1919', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 41.

²⁰⁹ Muhammad Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain* (Bombay and New York, 1946), 4-5.

regarding its unconstitutional, 'extremist' nature,²¹⁰ swiftly announced his candidacy for the 1920 Punjab elections.²¹¹

After securing his election at the 1920 Punjab elections,²¹² Husain was appointed in 1921 as Minister for Education by Edward MacLagan (1864-1952), O'Dwyer's successor as Punjab Governor, who had been impressed by Husain's recent efforts to refuse to allow Congress non-cooperators to trespass into educational institutions so that they could recruit party workers.²¹³ Husain then skilfully used his ministerial patronage powers to establish himself as the leader of the PLC's overwhelmingly rural Muslim members.²¹⁴ The result was Husain's unification of these members into a parliamentary group called the 'Rural Block'.²¹⁵

Ram's parliamentary career, meanwhile, got off to a false start. Unlike Husain and his ally Lal Chand,²¹⁶ Ram failed to secure his election to the PLC in 1920 due to a brief spell of unpopularity after his Congress resignation with local Jats who felt he had ignored them during his years of official favour during WWI. They therefore opted to elect an Arya Samaj backed candidate, in Rohtak's Jhajir and Sonapat rural seat, in his place.²¹⁷

Despite this, Ram had nevertheless demonstrated a strong commitment to the admittedly limited, democratic principles underpinning the reforms when he wrote in the *JG* on 24 March 1920 that:

[I]t is the duty of every educated person to make the villagers aware of the power of the vote. It is possible that whatever you explain, they may not understand it fully and may not be able to work with that power, but there is no doubt that after two or three elections the villagers themselves will understand which candidate they should vote for, because the vote creates its own earnestness in the voting person.²¹⁸

²¹⁰ Fazl-i-Husain to Azim Husain, 24 April 1936 in Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *Letters of Mian Fazl-i-Husain* (Lahore, 1976), https://sanipanhwar.com/uploads/books/2024-08-27_15-41-59_25bf99c6aa31d8750197717fb745bf6d.pdf, 446, (Accessed 15/09/25).

²¹¹ Tanwar, *Power*, 40, 43.

²¹² K. C. Yadav, *Elections in Punjab* (New Delhi, 1987), 50.

²¹³ Hanuman Parshad Sharma, 'The Unionist Party in Punjab', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Maharshi Dayanand University, 1989), 110-11.

²¹⁴ Page, *Partition*, 67-8; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 170-1.

²¹⁵ H. K. Trevaskis, *The Punjab of Today*, vol. 1 (Lahore, 1931), 145; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 170; Tanwar, *Power*, 43-4.

²¹⁶ Yadav, *Elections*, 46.

²¹⁷ CR, 'Matadaatao se Nidevan' ['Appeal to Voters'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 187-8; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 169.

²¹⁸ CR, 'Debat mein Sudbaron kee Vyakhya Karne ka Prashn' ['The Question of Explaining the Reforms in the Countryside'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 115.

Ram certainly benefited from this process in the short term, as his fortunes were transformed by the 1923 Punjab elections. His political influence grew from assuming the Vice-Chairmanship of the Rohtak District Board and Directorship of the local Cooperative Bank, while a rival Jat faction declined following the death of its two key leaders. In fact, Ram was briefly implicated in one of their deaths, allegedly at the initiative of local officials antagonised by his anti-corruption efforts in Rohtak, although his involvement was never conclusively proved.²¹⁹

The assumption of the cooperative bank directorship is particularly interesting to note here, however, as it showcases Ram's first genuine engagement with institutions which have been lauded by 'agrarian populists' historically, especially in Eastern Europe.²²⁰ Nevertheless, the history of these institutions in Punjab was chiefly the result of the 'imperial populism' of the Raj as the province's cooperative movement had been virtually non-existent until the passage of the Cooperative Credit Societies Act by the colonial state in 1904.²²¹ Indeed, in a *JG* article on 27 October 1920, Ram had proudly stated that Rohtak's Cooperative Central Bank (f. 1913) was 'one of the most successful banks in Punjab province'.²²² But more broadly, his skilful political self-fashioning ensured that he was elected to the PLC at the 1923 elections.

Despite his aggressive attacks on Husain for being a 'communalist' and 'anti-zamindar' on account of his urban background following Husain's appointment as a minister,²²³ which led him to support the efforts of Raja Narendra Nath (d. 1945), the leader of Punjab's urban Hindu PLC members who went on to become President of the right-wing, Hindu nationalist Mahasabha party in 1926,²²⁴ in his bitter broadside against Husain's policies in 1923, which particularly zoomed in on the implication of Husain's government's recruitment policies for Punjab's urban

²¹⁹ Shastri, *Chhotu Ram*, 103-4; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 168-70.

²²⁰ Canovan, *Populism*, 124.

²²¹ Ata Ullah, *The Co-operative Movement in the Punjab* (London, 1937), 84-5; Nikolay Kamenov, 'The Place of the 'Cooperative' in the Agrarian History of India', *JAS*, 79, 1 (2020), 104-5ff.

²²² CR, '*Krisbi Bank aur Rohtak Jila*' ['Agricultural Banks and Rohtak District'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 205.

²²³ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 171.

²²⁴ Richard Gordon, 'The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress', *MAS*, 9, 2 (1975), 182.

Hindu minority,²²⁵ Ram swiftly performed a *volte face* after the 1923 elections. Suddenly, he agreed to join the 'Rural Block' which, according to him, was officially re-named as the Unionist Party on 20 December 1923 following Husain's re-appointment as a Minister for Education and Local Self-Government, and Chand's selection as Minister for Agriculture,²²⁶ although Husain claimed that its true date of establishment was in 1924.²²⁷

Regardless, while Ram's decision to join the 'Rural Block'/Unionist Party might appear to be an example of careerism or political opportunism, agrarian idealism should not be dismissed as a motivating factor. In 1920, as President of Congress' Rohtak branch commenting on the party's own Reform proposals, Ram stated that:

[T]he Punjab Provincial Committee has adopted a distinctly sectarian attitude ... [and] has wholly identified itself with the urban and commercial classes ... while the general urban population of Jullundur town has received ... generous treatment, the poor rural Mahommedan population of that district seems to have been entirely lost sight of.²²⁸

Additionally, Ram was also thinking about rural India's developmental needs at this time as, in March 1920, he called for the elimination of 'the obstacles that are causing great difficulties in the development of agriculture', especially illiteracy by providing education because in India 'farming is [still] entirely in the hands of those people who ... have never seen the light of education in their homes'.²²⁹ In connection with this, Ram therefore called on Indian elites to treat peasants with greater respect:

The words 'peasant,' 'labourer' and 'villager' are often used interchangeably in a derogatory manner ... an educated individual, even if he is merely a middle school graduate, avoids engaging in agriculture out of fear of being labelled a mere villager ... This happens because our great educated gentlemen do not pay attention to the fact that respect for any profession is always based on the skill, ability, and efficiency of the person practicing it. If highly educated gentlemen apply the best methods and scientific principles to agriculture and

²²⁵ Page, *Partition*, 71-2; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 171; Muhammad Khurshid, *Feudal Ascendancy and the Role of Sir Fazl-i-Husain in the Punjab Politics* (Islamabad, 2014), 172-3.

²²⁶ CR, 'Lal Chand Krishi Mantri Niyukt Ho Gaye' ['Lal Chand Appointed as Agriculture Minister'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 607-9.

²²⁷ Bhupender Yadav, 'Aspects of the Unionist Party in Punjab Politics', (Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1989), 4n8.

²²⁸ Quoted in Page, *Partition*, 64-5.

²²⁹ CR, 'Krishi ke Vikas mein Rukavat ke Karun' ['Factors Hindering Agricultural Development'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 132.

significantly improve it, then farming in India will become a well-regarded and prestigious profession ...²³⁰

Therefore, Ram's partnership with Husain, rooted in their shared identities as landlords and urban lawyers plus their common hatred of 'Urban Hindus' despite their different confessional backgrounds,²³¹ cleared the path for revitalising his political career. The Unionist Party, largely a product of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms as adapted by O'Dwyer for Punjab, thus provided a formidable platform for developing his 'agrarian populist' ideology, particularly through cooperatives and land reform to support small peasants, while gaining parliamentary experience.

II: 'Neither in Power nor Out of Power'? Chhotu Ram and the Unionist Party Government, c.1923-30

This section examines Ram's parliamentary and ministerial career under the Unionist government (c.1923-30), arguing that his 'agrarian populist' agenda faced limited success amid relative economic stability. Ironically, his ideology gained greater political impact only after the Great Depression created severe economic disruption and intensified pressure on the Raj's imperial system.

Following his election to the PLC at the 1923 elections, Ram quickly got to work supporting his ally Lal Chand, the Minister for Agriculture.²³² Governor MacLagan had justified Chand's elevation, and Husain's reappointment as Minister for Education, on the grounds that Punjab's ministers should represent the views of the largest party in the PLC.²³³ After all, the Unionist Party had won 33/71 PLC seats at the 1923 elections.²³⁴

However, given that the Unionist Party was only formed *after* these elections, the Unionists probably controlled 39 seats in practice, comprised of thirty-two Muslim plus seven rural Hindu and Sikh parliamentarians, after several members associated with the Shiromani Gurdwara

²³⁰ Ibid., 133.

²³¹ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 172.

²³² Tika Ram, *Chhotu Ram*, 15.

²³³ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 173; Sharma, 'Unionist Party', 132-3.

²³⁴ Yadav, *Elections*, 133.

Parbandhak Committee,²³⁵ an organisation designed to manage Sikh places of worship in Punjab and the focus of the Akali Movement, which had emerged in 1920 in connection with the Non-Cooperation movement, and also wanted it to manage the community's shrines,²³⁶ stated to support it.²³⁷ In addition to this religious dimension, the movement was described by the Marxist writer M. N. Roy (1887-1954), as 'fundamentally agrarian' given its ability to attract considerable support from the Sikh peasantry in Punjab who subsequently took the lead in agitating against the Sikh landed aristocrats recently appointed by the British to oversee the community's holy places.²³⁸ Thus, the Unionists had a legislative majority of 7.²³⁹

Chand's ministerial tenure, however, proved brief due to the emergence of an election petition alleging his use of corrupt tactics during the 1923 elections that resulted in his disqualification as a PLC member. In response, the Unionist Party passed a resolution, subsequently forwarded to the Punjab Governor, calling for Ram to replace him. Thus, Ram was duly appointed by MacLagan as Punjab's Minister for Agriculture on 22 September 1924.²⁴⁰

As Agriculture Minister, c.1924-5, Ram's speeches in the Punjab Legislative Council Debates strongly reflect the pursuit of an 'agrarian populist' agenda. Thus, on 5 March 1925, he demanded money 'be paid to the officers of the Agricultural Department who have to... to afford relief to the flood-stricken people' in response to regular flooding in locales such as his own.²⁴¹ Although he did not want to completely reorient government spending towards agriculture given he also stated that day that he had 'every sympathy with the industrial development in the Province' and would 'do my very best to encourage and development [*sic*]

²³⁵ Gurdwara Management Committee.

²³⁶ Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Movement* (New Delhi, 1978), 15-150.

²³⁷ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 170.

²³⁸ M. N. Roy, 'The Peasant Movement in India', *International Press Correspondence*, 2, 51, (1922), 379.

²³⁹ Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain*, 153.

²⁴⁰ Tika Ram, *Chhotu Ram*, 15; 'Chhotu Ram: 1881-1945', xxxiii-xxxiv; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 172-3; Yadav, *Elections*, 59.

²⁴¹ CR, 'Agriculture Grant', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 130-1.

industry'.²⁴² Any other suggestion would have been irresponsible given that Ram had also been entrusted with coordinating Punjab's industrial policy.²⁴³

The most important action taken in this respect, c.1924-6, moreover, was Ram's decision to support the Mandi hydro-electric power scheme which he declared before the PLC ensured, when compared to an alternative scheme, that:

If a conflict between the factory owners who will depend for the working of their factories on a constant supply of power and the interests of irrigation which will demand occasional closures of canal arises ... the interest of irrigation and or irrigators, namely the poor zamindars that have no press behind their back [and] are practically voiceless would be both foremost in the government's mind and indeed would be prioritised.²⁴⁴

In promoting industrial projects, Ram clearly felt no conflict with asserting his agrarian constituents' interests. He also strongly supported rural industries, successfully passing a motion on 6 May 1925 providing Rs. 50,000 for the agriculture department to fund schools promoting 'cottage industries'. In a brief speech, Ram justified his request with robust remarks:

I think it is very difficult for people who live in Lahore to bring themselves down to the level of the people of the rural population who have very humble demands. These schools are meant only to promote cottage industries ... [and they are] really meant for rural areas only where the needs of the people are very humble and can be met by persons trained in these humble schools.²⁴⁵

As Minister for Agriculture, Ram also pointed out several lacunae in policies governing the recruitment of inspector and assistant registrars of Punjabi cooperative societies, institutions that would be essential for curtailing the power of the urban money lender.²⁴⁶ In a speech requesting funding for the Agriculture department on 3 December 1925, Ram described 'co-operation' as a 'special subject' when he spoke of his desire to establish:

[L]ibraries ...at centres where we have co-operative unions ... [because] it is not possible to combine libraries of a general character with libraries ... [of] a special character.²⁴⁷

²⁴² CR, 'Industries', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 139.

²⁴³ Agnihotri and Malik, *Profile*, 26.

²⁴⁴ CR, 'Resolution Re. Appointment of a Committee to Enquire into the Relative Merits of the ... Mandi Hydro-Electric Scheme', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 156.

²⁴⁵ CR, 'Industries Grant', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 145.

²⁴⁶ CR, 'Recruitment of Inspector and Assistant Registrars of Co-operative Societies', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 146.

²⁴⁷ CR, 'Agriculture Grant', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 152.

In this context, it is therefore unsurprising that Punjab's cooperative movement found strong support from Ram's Unionist Party, which oversaw an increase in the number of various kinds of service cooperatives from 5,088 to 19,462, c.1919-29.²⁴⁸

Ram's capabilities as a minister and his growing stature within the Unionist Party c.1924-5, is reflected in that when Husain was promoted to the Punjab Governor's Executive Council as Revenue Member in late 1925,²⁴⁹ he was selected as Punjab's Minister for Education in his place.²⁵⁰ Such an appointment was fitting given Ram's argument back in 1907 that the single best option for 'improving' rural society lay in the expansion of rural primary education. Indeed, Ram had even gone further in a *JG* article of February 1918, where he argued that the 'importance of following rules and working in a disciplined way cannot be truly understood ... [without] education'. Thus, he called for the spread of education on the widest possible scale to achieve this goal and to foster respect for institutional authority plus community cohesion.²⁵¹

Fortunately for Ram, the Unionists had the political will to make headway on his assertions given that they increased spending on education from Rs. 215.5 lakhs²⁵² in 1922 to Rs. 288 lakhs which allowed for a growth in student numbers in primary and vernacular schools from 546,130 and 131,475 to 797,713 and 342,841, c.1922-27.²⁵³ Back in November 1924, when Ram was still Minister for Agriculture, he had also endorsed a resolution on 'free and compulsory primary education'.²⁵⁴

In terms of Ram's own approach to educational policy, moreover, its agrarian thrust can be gleaned from a letter he wrote to the Punjab government in September 1926. There, Ram argued that education provided in the countryside should be tailored more closely to the needs of rural

²⁴⁸ *Report on the Working of Co-operative Credit Societies in the Punjab* (Lahore, 1929), 1.

²⁴⁹ Page, *Prelude to Partition*, 91; Khurshid, *Fazl-i-Husain*, 222-3.

²⁵⁰ Verma, *Chhotu Ram*, 76.

²⁵¹ CR, 'Ektā' ['Unity'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 28-9.

²⁵² A *lakh* is one hundred thousand.

²⁵³ Tanwar, *Power*, 61.

²⁵⁴ CR, 'Resolution on Free and Compulsory Primary Education', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 116-17.

life, so that it motivates the peasant's child to retain an interest in farming rather than abandon it.

Hence his praise for Gurgaon's recently established:

[S]chool of Rural Economic [*sic*] ... [which] was started ... for training of teachers and patwaris ... to deal with crops, diseases of animals, banking, and co-operation, land revenue administration, first aid, Public Health, Forestry, games accounting [*sic*] ... etc.²⁵⁵

In so doing, Ram acknowledged that Gurgaon - a district in the extreme southeast of Punjab and the site of ICS officer F. L. Brayne (1882-1952)'s much-publicised 'Gurgaon Experiment' (c.1920-7)²⁵⁶ - was 'doubly handicapped': not only was it mired in poverty and famine, but its remoteness placed it far from Punjab's urban universities.²⁵⁷ Brayne's schemes sought to morally reform the peasantry by instilling thrift and industriousness through institutions like the School of Rural Economy praised by Ram above.²⁵⁸ However, while Brayne's approach implied the peasantry were at fault for their own poverty,²⁵⁹ Ram's analysis was more structural. Thus, he urged the Punjab government to extend affirmative action policies to rural districts, arguing that 'very considerable concessions' were needed to ensure Gurgaon received its fair share of access to higher education in the province.²⁶⁰

But despite formulating a distinct policy approach in both agriculture and education and making some progress in implementing it, the results of the 1926 Punjab elections set off a chain of events that conspired to halt Ram's ministerial career and made it much harder for him to continue to develop and advance his 'agrarian populist' ideology. In 1926, the Unionist Party had secured 31/71 PLC seats,²⁶¹ however the true number was probably 33.²⁶²

Regardless, on either count, the result was that the Unionist Party had lost its majority in the PLC. Following the elections, Manohar Lal (1871-1949), a PLC member representing an urban

²⁵⁵ 'Letter from Chaudhri Chhotu Ram', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 186.

²⁵⁶ F. L. Brayne, *Village Uplift in India* (Allahabad, 1928), 1-33.

²⁵⁷ 'Letter from Chaudhri Chhotu Ram', 186; cf. Gurpreet Kaur, 'Development of Higher Education in Colonial Punjab', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2021), 84-91.

²⁵⁸ Brayne, *Uplift*, 35-44.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Clive Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes* (London, 1993), 61-2ff.

²⁶⁰ 'Letter from ... Ram', 186.

²⁶¹ Yadav, *Elections*, 133.

²⁶² Sharma, 'Unionist Party', 151.

Hindu constituency and a nominee of Raja Narendra Nath, who as we noted earlier was the leader of the PLC's urban Hindu members, was then appointed in Ram's place as Minister for Education.²⁶³ Thus, Ram's tenure as Minister for Education expired in January 1927,²⁶⁴ and he was replaced by a figure who appeared to represent a politics inimical to his. Consequently, these developments resulted in Ram's relegation to the parliamentary back benches until 1937 when he was appointed as Development Minister following the victory of the Unionists in the 1937 Punjab elections.²⁶⁵

To explain his sudden removal as a minister, a British official later said that it was the result of a direct intervention from Sir Malcolm Hailey (1872-1969), the Governor of Punjab from 1924-8, who had decided that Ram 'had neither the character nor ... [the] ability' to execute the role.²⁶⁶ Chowdhry, however, exposed the glibness of this claim when she convincingly argued that it was really driven by imperial politicking,²⁶⁷ supporting her position with a quote from 1927 correspondence between Lord Irwin (1881-1959), Viceroy of India (1926-31) and F. E. Smith (1872-1930), Earl of Birkenhead and Secretary of State for India (1924-8) specifically Irwin's suggestion that Hailey's action was motivated by a desire to placate urban Hindu members who:

[B]elieved that they had suffered greatly from what they described as a coalition of Government and the Muslim community ... [and] that if he [Hailey] carried on with the old Ministry, the Hindu party as such would have been permanently excluded ... [Thus,] they would have entirely refused to accept the pro-Moslem Chhotu Ram as a representative.²⁶⁸

Furthermore, Hailey was also concerned that these members would potentially join the Swaraj Party,²⁶⁹ which had been founded by moderate Congressman who wanted to organise Congress along the lines of a more constitutional strategy post Non-Cooperation movement, which we will discuss further in chapter 2, and which had won 12 seats at the 1923 Punjab elections.²⁷⁰

²⁶³ J. Krishnamurty, 'Manohar Lal', *MAS*, 44, 3 (2010), 655.

²⁶⁴ Bajaj, 'Chhotu Ram', 24n99.

²⁶⁵ Rathee and Nandal, *Chhotu Ram*, 12.

²⁶⁶ Trevaskis, *Punjab*, 148.

²⁶⁷ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 176.

²⁶⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 175.

²⁶⁹ Self-rule Party.

²⁷⁰ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience* (Cambridge, 1977), 8; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 176-7; Yadav, *Elections*, 133.

The main consequence of Hailey's decision was that the 'constitutional practice', established by MacLagan of selecting ministers primarily on the basis of party strength in the PLC, was eroded by the placing of more emphasis on the religious community they represented.²⁷¹ Thus, Feroz Khan Noon (1893-1970), a Muslim Unionist and Jogendra Singh (1877-1946), a non-party Sikh would now serve alongside Manohar Lal as ministers.²⁷² The PLC was also effectively converted into an even more 'loyal' body as Manohar Lal's appointment led urban Hindu members to support the government.

Ram's take on the situation, meanwhile, was summarised in his remark that his party was now 'neither in power nor out of power',²⁷³ which implies that the British identitarian approach to Indian politics, i.e. of 'divide and rule' as practised by Hailey, demonstrated that there were limits to the Raj's 'imperial populism' and Ram's more genuine agrarianism would have to be re-moulded at least in the short term.

Despite this setback, Ram was clearly still considered an important player by the Unionist parliamentary party as he was elected as their leader in February 1927.²⁷⁴ Soon after, Ram gave his first major parliamentary speech in this role on 7 March 1927. This speech amounted to a brazen attack on the Punjab government's Finance Member, Sir Geoffrey de Montmorency (1876-1955), for his tendency to 'over-estimate expenditure and to under-estimate income and to conceal a large amount of surplus' in the preparation of Punjab's budget.²⁷⁵

Attributing these mistakes largely to an in-built assumption that cotton prices would remain at a low level despite recent signs of a recovery,²⁷⁶ Ram called on the government to take advantage of an actual surplus in its finances by abolishing *chahi* rates,²⁷⁷ which he lampooned as a tax on

²⁷¹ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 176.

²⁷² John W. Cell, *Hailey* (Cambridge, 1992), 141; Tanwar, *Power*, 71, 84n39.

²⁷³ Quoted in Tanwar *Unionist Party*, 68.

²⁷⁴ 'Chhotu Ram: 1881-1945', xxxiv.

²⁷⁵ CR, 'General Discussion of the Budget', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol.1, 219.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁷⁷ A tax on irrigated land.

the productivity and positive work ethic of the peasant. He also claimed that rate cuts would benefit 'the poorest section of the Punjab population.'²⁷⁸

Additionally, Ram argued that the government had the fiscal headroom to make the land revenue demand more progressive because at present:

[N]o matter what the amount of land may be and what the amount of income there from may be, ... [the peasant] has to pay something to the State every six months.²⁷⁹

Such an action, Ram claimed, moreover, would directly benefit the small landholder.²⁸⁰ Thus, on 22 February 1928, Ram moved a resolution in the PLC asking it to impress recommend to the government that the land revenue should be made more progressive by reforming it in line with the way in which income-tax was calculated.²⁸¹ Unfortunately for Ram, however, his amendment was opposed by Husain who said that it would simply shift the revenue demand onto the classes directly above those just given relief. To Ram's chagrin, he also dismissed it as something 'people with Bolshevik tendencies might advocate.'²⁸²

To understand Husain's position, we should acknowledge that ever since his election to the PLC in 1920 he had not only extended support to large Muslim landowners but also to other powerful 'elite' interests within Muslim society such as the *pirs* and *sajjada nashins*²⁸³ who controlled large landed estates and/or had extensive followings within rural Punjab.²⁸⁴ Also, most Unionist PLC members tended to come from such families, especially in West Punjab, which gave this branch of the party quite a different character to Ram's side which regularly appealed to small peasants.²⁸⁵ So, they followed Husain's lead and voted his amendment down.²⁸⁶

²⁷⁸ CR, 'General Discussion of the Budget', 225.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 225-6.

²⁸¹ CR, 'Application of the Principles of Assessment of Income Tax to the Assessment of Land Revenue', 342.

²⁸² *Punjab Legislative Council Debates (PLCD)*, XI (Part I), (1928), 86-7,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250630021902/https://www.pap.gov.pk/uploads/verbatim/text/en/pb-legis-council-debates-vol-xi-1928-part-i.pdf>, (Accessed 12/09/25).

²⁸³ Sufi religious leaders and custodians.

²⁸⁴ Tanwar, *Power*, 45; cf. Sarah F. D. Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power* (Cambridge, 1992), 119-20, 157-8.

²⁸⁵ Talbot, 'Collaborators', 78-9.

²⁸⁶ *PLCD*, XI (Part I), 129-30.

Given these difficult parliamentary conditions, Ram decided to undertake more extra-parliamentary organisational work among Punjabi peasants. The main organisation through which he did this was his own Zamindara League,²⁸⁷ which may have been founded as early as 1917 although it probably rose to prominence as a wing of the Unionist Party to expand its presence into Punjab's villages after 1923.²⁸⁸ Thus, from 1926-9, Ram visited every Punjabi district to gain a better understanding of their rural conditions.²⁸⁹

It is therefore reasonably clear that Ram was quite unique among Unionist leaders, especially vis-à-vis Husain, in that he strived for a 'mass following'.²⁹⁰ Indeed, in the penultimate article of his famous '*Bechara Zamindar*'²⁹¹ series of articles for the *JG* which were published as a book in 1933,²⁹² Ram implored Punjabi peasants to organise themselves politically by forming a:

[S]trong and popular central Zamindar League ... Every district and sub-division should have branches of this party, and ... at least one English daily newspaper, and several others in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi ... Every district and sub-division should have a band of active workers of the Zamindar League to propagate the principles and programmes of the party ...

Oh peasant! If you satisfy this two-fold condition, God's representatives are keenly awaiting to hand over the administration of Punjab to you.²⁹³

However, it remains unclear whether Ram primarily represented 'small' peasants or an 'elite' within the peasantry.

To interrogate this issue, two of Ram's 1929 PLC speeches are illuminating as they reflect his changed strategy for advancing 'agrarian populist' goals after the disappointments of c.1926-7.

On 21 March, Ram had responded to attacks upon him made in response to his highly critical 19 March speech on the policies of the Punjab agriculture department.²⁹⁴ On 19 March, Ram referred to the Punjab government's provincial veterinary service where only 52.4% were of 'zamindar' background despite having 66% of its jobs reserved for them in 1919. This situation

²⁸⁷ Peasants' League.

²⁸⁸ Agnihotri and Malik, *Profile*, 39; cf. Talbot, 'Collaborators', 78.

²⁸⁹ Gopal, *Biography*, 72.

²⁹⁰ Datta, *Identity*, 109n144.

²⁹¹ *The Helpless Peasant*.

²⁹² Ranbir Singh and Kushal Pal, 'Prologue', in idem (eds.), *Peasantry in Colonial India* (Gurgaon, 2013), 23.

²⁹³ CR, 'The Future of the Punjab Peasantry', [1933] in Balbir Singh, *Sir Chhotu Ram* (New Delhi, 2009), 230.

²⁹⁴ CR, 'Agriculture Grant', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 404-21.

was insidious to Ram because the entire remit of the department affected ‘zamindars’. Thus, in demanding that ‘zamindars’ be given a ‘proper share’ of the department’s jobs,²⁹⁵ as well as the university places needed to acquire them, Ram essentially made a moral/quasi-legal case that called on the Punjab government to fulfil past promises.²⁹⁶

Ram’s 21 March speech therefore aimed to repudiate attacks labelling his line of argument as ‘communalism’ - meaning promoting ‘zamindar’ interests at others’ expense, not religious group loyalty in this context. He responded by asserting that his politics ‘stands on the basis of common secular and economic interests’.²⁹⁷ Later that year, in September 1929, Ram also addressed the religious aspect when he insisted that he was:

[N]ot a communal minded person ... [but a] pure zamindar... [and] I do not stand either for Hindu rights or Muslim rights ... [but] for the rights of zamindars.²⁹⁸

Even so, while Ram’s *JG* did generally play down the significance of Hindu-Muslim antagonism in Punjab, for example he stated on 21 December 1927 that ‘if one truly followed religion, all fights and conflicts [between Hindus and Muslims] would end’,²⁹⁹ communal newspapers like the *Muslim Outlook* were criticising Jats (and by extension Ram) for having taken over the majority of jobs in Rohtak district’s administration by then.³⁰⁰

Regardless, in his PLC speech of 21 March, Ram chastised his critics for failing to take seriously the legitimate grievances of the ‘zamindars’ when he claimed that:

[T]he urban section of this House, inebriated with the wine of power ... think that the demands of the zamindars are a joke ... [however] the time is not far when ... the tide of the zamindar movement will advance and sweep away all including the worthy doctor before it.³⁰¹

The ‘worthy doctor’ to whom Ram was referring was surely Dr Gokul Chand Narang (1878-1969), an urban Hindu leader strongly associated with the Hindu Mahasabha,³⁰² and PLC

²⁹⁵ CR, ‘Agriculture Grant’, in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 394-7.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 397ff.

²⁹⁷ CR, ‘Agriculture Grant’, 404-5.

²⁹⁸ CR, ‘Discussion on the Report’, 428.

²⁹⁹ ‘*Raay Saahab Chaudhary Chhotu Ram ka Prasiddh Bhaashan*’ [‘Rai Saheb Chaudhary Chhotu Ram’s Famous Speech’] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 683.

³⁰⁰ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 101.

³⁰¹ CR, ‘Agriculture Grant’, 407.

³⁰² Bhuwan Kumar Jha, ‘Militarizing the Community’, *Studies in History*, 29, 1 (2013), 126n29.

member for the North-West Hindu Urban constituency,³⁰³ given his subsequent, albeit rather conciliatory, and perhaps slightly sarcastic, comment directed at ‘the honourable member’ for the ‘North-West Hindu Urban Constituency’ that:

If the urban friends who occupy these benches are prepared to help us [*sic*] we are prepared to help them also.³⁰⁴

Indeed, Ram’s relationships with communalist politicians on the Hindu side were also shot through with tension. In September 1929 in a debate on the ‘Report of the Punjab Reforms Committee’, which was established to cooperate with the British Government’s Simon Commission which, in 1927, was given a remit to review the Government of India Act, 1919, and suggest further reforms,³⁰⁵ of which Gokul Chand Narang was a member,³⁰⁶ he claimed that:

In July 1926, he [Chand Narang] made a definite offer to me in the name of the Hindu community after consultation with Hindu leaders that they would see that I was returned to the Council unopposed and that I should be re-appointed Minister with the unanimous support of the Hindu community, provided I ... gave up my cult of zamindar as against the non-zamindar. And he also told me that I might name any other price, which would satisfy me. I told him curtly that my principles had no price.³⁰⁷

Furthermore, articulating this point when discussing the demand in the Punjab Reforms Committee’s report for a provincial constitution for Punjab which guaranteed certain ‘fundamental rights’, Ram argued that Gokul and his allies desired:

[T]o have the Land Alienation Act repealed, ... the Government resolution of 1919 repealed and to have all the land laws or customary laws which now operate in favour of the poor agricultural classes also repealed.³⁰⁸

This was on account of their partiality to urban interests and hostility to the dominance of the predominantly Muslim Unionist Party in Punjabi Politics in Ram’s account.³⁰⁹ Expressing his opposition, Ram wrapped up his speech in blistering fashion:

My honourable friend Dr. Gokul Chand Narang drew a frightful picture of Muslim Raj in this province. My Muslim colleagues have repudiated any desire on their part to establish a

³⁰³ Yadav, *Elections*, 61.

³⁰⁴ CR, ‘Agriculture Grant’, 407.

³⁰⁵ Brown, *Disobedience*, 13.

³⁰⁶ Nair, *Homelands*, 82.

³⁰⁷ CR, ‘Discussion on the Report’, 427-8.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 431.

³⁰⁹ Nair, *Homelands*, 83-6.

Muslim Raj in this province ... Even if there were any desire on their part to have a Muslim Raj it would not be possible ... I know that with my help a certain type of raj can be, and I hope, will be established ... a zamindar raj.³¹⁰

Punjab's communal politics was therefore essentially playing out on a rural-urban axis, and despite Ram's anti-communal approach articulated here, recent research had suggested that his ideology would later take on some 'pro-Hindu' aspects, especially regarding constitutional matters, from the early 1930s.³¹¹

Nevertheless, in the 21 March debate, Ram then responded to Punjab Reforms Committee member Narendra Nath, who had claimed that the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms created a political system that was destroying the province's urban Hindus' economic standing in favour of landed Muslims,³¹² which Ram summarised as amounting to a suggestion that 'the zamindars should demand no more than equal justice'. To Narendra Nath's assertion, Ram sternly said that if:

[H]e had carefully considered what I said [*sic*] he would have been convinced that the demand I put forward was not in excess of what was due to the zamindars on the basis of considerations of equal justice.³¹³

What is most significant about Ram's response to Nath, however, is that, while engaging with him, he explained what he meant by the term 'zamindar', which had a different meaning in Punjab when compared to Bihar, Andhra and UP, as we will see in chapters 2-4, where it was used to refer to large aristocratic landlords operating under the *zamindari* system of tax collection, which did not exist in Punjab where revenue was collected through villages via the *mahawari*³¹⁴ system.³¹⁵

Referring to the deliberations of the committee that, in 1919, first proposed the reservations for those of rural origin in Punjab's government departments, Ram therefore invoked what he

³¹⁰ CR, 'Discussion on the Report', 434-5.

³¹¹ Cf. Naumana Kiran, 'Sir Chhotu Ram', *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 47, 1 (2010), 143-4ff.

³¹² Nair, *Homelands*, 86; cf. Nath, *Memorandum*, *passim*.

³¹³ CR, 'Agriculture Grant', 410-11.

³¹⁴ A *mahal* in this context means an 'estate' or 'village.'

³¹⁵ Stokes, *Utilitarians*, 81-139; cf. Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal* (Paris, 1963), *passim*; Gill, *Division*, 36-40.

claimed was its definition of a 'zamindar' as 'all hereditary proprietors and tenure holders of land mainly dependent upon agriculture and residing in rural areas'.³¹⁶ Elaborating upon it, he also stated that 'statutory agriculturists', i.e. peasants with legal recognition under the LAA, 'would certainly form only a section, but an overwhelmingly large section, of the class which falls within this definition of 'zamindar':

[T]he contention of those who do not share my views is that the proportion of statutory agriculturists in the population of the Punjab is only 50 or 51 per cent, [so] they ... should not be in a position to claim the benefit of the proportions that have been laid down under the resolution of 1919. Well ... Where is the rest of the share to go? Is it to go to moneylenders?³¹⁷

The exact proportion of 'statutory agriculturists' relative to Punjab's overall population by 1929 is unclear. However, the 1921 Census stated that 'agriculturists' constituted 63.1% of Punjab's population, with 45.4% deemed 'cultivators' - which is close to the 50% figure mentioned by Ram above. This 45.4% included Ram's Jat caste of peasant proprietors (21.8%),³¹⁸ which had held 'agricultural tribe' status in Rohtak since 1904 at least.³¹⁹

Thus, when this is acknowledged alongside the fact that other castes also included within the 1921 Census' 'cultivators' category, such as the Rajput and Arain communities,³²⁰ were also considered to hold 'agricultural tribe' status in Rohtak by this date,³²¹ groups which Ram would sometimes attempt to speak on behalf of alongside his own Jat community,³²² and indeed in other Punjabi districts,³²³ although it should be noted here that by 1931 less than half of Rohtak's Muslim minority would hold 'agricultural tribe' status,³²⁴ which was a source of tension, makes the assertion of Ram's critics that 'statutory agriculturists' only made up about 50% of Punjab's population by 1929 a reasonable working assumption.

³¹⁶ CR, 'Agriculture Grant', 411.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 411-12.

³¹⁸ *Census of India, 1921*, vol 15, Part 1 (Lahore, 1923), 347.

³¹⁹ 'Punjab Government Notification No. 63', in Om Prakash Aggarwal, *Agrarian Legislation in the Punjab*, vol. 1 (Lahore, 1940), 94-5.

³²⁰ *Census of India, 1921*, 347.

³²¹ 'Notification', 95.

³²² CR, 'Definition of Zamindar and the High Court', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 2, 302-3.

³²³ 'Notification', 95ff.

³²⁴ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 101-2.

Despite demographic imprecision, Ram answered his own question about whether money lenders had any right to government jobs below the 66% 'zamindar' reservation. Asserting that Hindu money lenders 'will squeeze the last drop of blood out of all zamindars whether statutory agriculturists or otherwise', he argued that the relevant:

[S]hare should go to statutory agriculturists who have the same disabilities and ... same grievances and ... difficulties as the slightly larger class of people who are to be treated as zamindars under the definition adopted by ... [the] Committee.³²⁵

Following this, Ram asserted that members of the 'untouchable' *chamar*³²⁶ and the backward *ghumar*³²⁷ castes, who made up 4.5% and 2.3% of the population in 1921, alongside carpenters and blacksmiths living in villages, who made up 4.1% and 1.3% also in 1921,³²⁸ all included under the 1921 Census 'agriculturist' category, although, unlike the Jats and other 'cultivators', such communities did not tend to hold 'agricultural tribe' status in Ram's Rohtak and indeed other Punjabi districts under the LAA,³²⁹ were more deserving of posts than moneylenders or urban groups because, like other rural 'non-agriculturists', they shared common interests with ordinary farmers. Therefore, Ram warned that if these jobs went to outsiders, rural communities would be exploited.

Even so, Ram did not therefore conclude that these less privileged rural groups should take up any surplus of reserved jobs, arguing instead that they should go to 'zamindars' with legal rights because:

[T]hey are in the best position to champion the cause, and safeguard the interests of those humble classes who reside in rural areas, and live on agriculture, though they are not members of notified agricultural tribes.³³⁰

³²⁵ CR, 'Agriculture Grant', 412.

³²⁶ A leather working caste.

³²⁷ Or *Kumhar* - a potter caste.

³²⁸ *Census of India, 1921*, vol 15, Part 1, 347.

³²⁹ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 64ff; cf. Gill, *Division*, 110ff.

³³⁰ CR, 'Agriculture Grant', 413.

Overall, therefore, while Ram clearly sought to represent the interests of peasant proprietors or tenants with strong legal rights, he did make some effort to speak on behalf of less privileged rural groups.³³¹

Moreover, by 1929, Ram's combative PLC exchanges reflected his broader frustration with the Unionist Party's struggles to pass agrarian reforms, which began with the 1925 Punjab Agricultural Marketing Bill aimed at helping farmers sell produce and curb corrupt trade practices,³³² an agenda Charan Singh sought to advance in UP by the late 1930s (see chapter 4). However, Hailey vetoed the Bill, as was his right in relation to any bill he disapproved of under the constitutional provisions introduced by the Government of India Act, 1919.³³³

In 1926, the Unionist Party then sought to halve the land revenue demand from 50% to 25% to benefit peasant taxpayers through the Punjab Land Revenue Amendment Bill.³³⁴ Despite this, British officials also refused to accept this bill, which they thought was biased toward rural areas. Consequently, despite its re-introduction with a new revenue rate of 33% from 25% in February,³³⁵ Hailey also vetoed this Bill on the grounds that the Government of India would regard it as unacceptable.³³⁶

Unionist legislative efforts would, however, first come to fruition when, on 12 February 1929, the Party secured Lord Irwin's assent for their Punjab Land Revenue Amendment Bill, which had been passed by the PLC on 11 May 1928.³³⁷ By this point, Hailey had been replaced by Sir Geoffrey de Montmorency as Governor, and the Punjab Government, concerned that Punjabi agriculturists would conduct extra parliamentary opposition if the bill was not passed, had

³³¹ Cf. Chowdhry, *Politics*, 198.

³³² Tanwar, *Power*, 64.

³³³ Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 29; Vincent A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, revised by Percival Spear (New Delhi and New York, 1981), 787.

³³⁴ Tanwar, *Power*, 64.

³³⁵ *PLCD*, vol. IX-A, (1926), 179-88, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250630021628/https://www.pap.gov.pk/uploads/verbatim/text/en/pujb-legislative-council-debates-Vol-ix-A-1926.pdf>, (Accessed 16/09/25).

³³⁶ Tanwar, *Power*, 64.

³³⁷ *PLCD*, vol. XII (Part I), (1928-9), 381, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250630021932/https://www.pap.gov.pk/uploads/verbatim/text/en/pb-legis-council-debates-vol-xii-1928-1929-part-i.pdf>, (Accessed 16/09/11).

therefore decided to recommend its approval to Irwin.³³⁸ In essence, this bill was a second attempt to reduce the land revenue to 25%.

During the proceedings, Ram's attempt to pass an amendment, on 7 May 1928, to exempt small farmers from paying it,³³⁹ was opposed by representatives of larger landlords within the PLC, including his colleague Husain.³⁴⁰ Husain's objection was that the bill granted the Government excessive powers beyond aiding smallholders, which could be misused politically to favour supporters and harm opponents.³⁴¹

But despite renewed disagreement with Husain, Ram was nevertheless satisfied with the passage of the bill which he later said was 'of very vital importance to the Zamindars' and had been 'secured by the National Unionist party in the teeth of opposition both from the government and the urban members of the Hindu Sabha party'.³⁴² Indeed, his interest in land reform had clear 'agrarian populist' overtones given his argument in the debate on the measure of 8 May 1928 that:

[I]t has been urged that the State has [*sic*] right to claim a larger share for itself than in the case of other taxes on account of their ownership of land ... [T]his theory is based on a certain text appearing in one of the old Hindu Shastras.³⁴³ But I beg to submit that the interpretation that has been placed on that text is misleading. If that text were to be correctly interpreted, ... far from advocating State ownership of land, that text shows clearly and plainly that land belongs to the occupier or the tiller of that land and not to the State ... That text says that just as a wild deer belongs to the man to whose arrow it falls, so does the land belong to him who first occupies it or tills it, but the State is entitled to get a certain share out of its produce.³⁴⁴

This argument was further developed by later 'agrarian populists' in India - especially Charan Singh (see chapter 4), and to a lesser extent Sahajanand and Ranga (see chapters 2-3) - to press for the abolition of large-scale aristocratic landlordism, which was less prevalent in Punjab. This

³³⁸ Sharma, 'Unionist Party', 160.

³³⁹ CR, 'The Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Bill', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 362-4.

³⁴⁰ *PLCD*, vol. XI (Part II), 975ff, 980,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250630021920/https://www.pap.gov.pk/uploads/verbatim/text/en/pb-legis-council-debates-vol-xi-1928-part-ii.pdf>, (Accessed 16/11/25).

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 975, 977.

³⁴² Quoted in Sharma, 'Unionist Party', 160.

³⁴³ *PLCD*, vol. XI (Part II), 1010-1017; cf. Patrick Olivelle (trans.), *The Law Code of Manu* [200 BCE to 200CE] (Oxford, 2004), 115-6, 177, 188.

³⁴⁴ CR, 'Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment Bill)', 365; cf. Olivelle, *Manu*, 157-8.

marked an important intellectual and political moment, namely, the arrival of Hindu jurisprudence as an ‘adjacent’ concept in Indian ‘agrarian populist’ ideology, signalling the rising assertiveness of peasant proprietors and their representatives in Indian politics.

Another positive development, from Ram’s point of view, moreover, was Unionist success in passing another important piece of agrarian legislation, the Punjab Regulation of Accounts Bill, on 14 December 1929.³⁴⁵ The bill originated in 1924 when the Unionist Party introduced the Punjab Moneylenders’ Bill to protect agriculturists from potentially exploitative moneylenders through mandatory account keeping and penalties for violations.³⁴⁶ After all, despite the 1900 LAA, rural debt in Punjab grew rapidly into the 1920s, driven by a new class of wealthy rural moneylenders - mainly rich agriculturist landlords, often Jats - and urban lenders exploiting loopholes in the law. As peasants needed credit during bad seasons, these lenders gained increasing control over land ownership.³⁴⁷

The 1924 Bill had been denounced as ‘mischievous’ by Lajpat Rai while Gokul Chand Narang said it would cause all trade to cease. Thus, after its reintroduction and passage in 1925, albeit in yet a different guise,³⁴⁸ Hailey vetoed it in 1926, despite his own officials supporting it, following advice from his lawyers that ‘the drafting was irremediably defective, and there seemed to be a danger that agricultural credit would dry up.’³⁴⁹

Despite this setback, Hailey had promised a government measure on the subject at the time of his veto,³⁵⁰ and so eventually, after his departure as Governor in 1928, Mr A. M. Stow, the Punjab Government’s Finance Member, re-introduced it into the PLC on 26 July 1929, invoking

³⁴⁵ *PLCD*, vol. XIV, (1929), 1013-14, https://web.archive.org/web/20250630022025/https://www.pap.gov.pk/uploads/verbatim/text/en/pb-legis-council-debate-vol-xiv_1929.pdf, (Accessed 16/09/25).

³⁴⁶ Tanwar, *Power*, 62.

³⁴⁷ Barrier, *Alienation*, 82-3.

³⁴⁸ Tanwar, *Power*, 62-3.

³⁴⁹ Cell, *Hailey*, 139.

³⁵⁰ Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain*, 147-8.

Hailey's promise to establish the Government's position in the following debates.³⁵¹ Therefore, despite Husain's concern with several of its provisions for limiting loans to 'an advance not exceeding Rs. 100 in value', in addition to Ram's desire for stronger penalties on lenders found to have violated the legislation, which he had expressed as a member of a parliamentary select committee on the bill,³⁵² it ultimately was put into effect in Punjab on 1 July 1931.³⁵³

By late 1929, the Unionist Party's progress on rural legislation was therefore a positive, albeit qualified, development for those sympathetic to Ram's 'agrarian populist' ideology, which had matured into a fully-fledged creed advocating land reform informed by a notion of peasant proprietorship and service cooperatives within an, albeit imperfect, parliamentary democratic framework despite wavering from the British and Husain's wing. The Unionist Party clearly benefited electorally from such efforts, achieving easy victory at the 1930 Punjab elections with 37/71 seats in the PLC, restoring the majority lost in 1926.³⁵⁴ But it was only after the Great Depression's arrival in Punjab that the rural drift in Punjabi politics - initially encapsulated by the Unionist Party's creation - became entrenched, allowing Ram's 'agrarian populist' ideology to properly make an impression.

III: An Agrarian Populist Breakthrough? Chhotu Ram, the Great Depression and the Making of the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act, c.1930-4

This section examines Ram's career from the 1930 elections to the passage of the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act in 1934, arguing that debt relief allowed him to synthesise his 'agrarian populist' commitments to land reform, cooperatives and democracy through legislation establishing debt conciliation boards and restricting moneylender interest rates, thereby protecting peasant proprietors from debt and land alienation during economic hardship.

³⁵¹ *PLCD*, vol. XIII, (1929), 27-8,
https://web.archive.org/web/20250630022015/https://www.pap.gov.pk/uploads/verbatim/text/en/pb-legis-council-debate-vol-xiii_1929.pdf, (Accessed 16/09/25).

³⁵² Chowdhry, *Politics*, 251.

³⁵³ Sharma, 'Unionist Party', 161.

³⁵⁴ Yadav, *Elections*, 133.

When the Great Depression arrived in India in 1930, Punjab was immediately in crisis. The wheat price, a crop that Punjab produced a third of British India's total in the 1920s which made it disproportionately vulnerable to price fluctuations when compared to other Indian regions,³⁵⁵ fell from Rs. 5 to Rs. 3 per maund,³⁵⁶ c.1930-1. Its main cause was a massive Australian harvest in late-1930 which, combined with reduced global demand for Indian agricultural products and the Australian pound's devaluation in January 1931, incentivised importing cheap Australian wheat into India.³⁵⁷ Thus, as Ram remarked in the PLC on 24 October 1930:

Wheat which used to be sold at 5, 6 or 7 seers³⁵⁸ to a rupee, has now come to be sold at ... about 22 to 23 seers to a rupee.³⁵⁹

To make matters worse, the wheat price fell further to Rs. 2 per maund in the first half of 1931.³⁶⁰ In this context, Ram rose in the PLC on 7 March 1931 to seek support for his agrarian constituents in Rohtak. At this time, Rohtak was, like all south-eastern Punjabi districts, also suffering from a severe lack of rainfall.³⁶¹ Furthermore, Ram also noted an 'abnormal number of dacoities³⁶² in the district' in recent times. However, he did not start to bang a law-and-order drum but rather beseeched the government to introduce a 'liberal remission of land revenue this year' because the real cause of the district's present distress was a 'severe economic depression' for which 'the people at large are not to blame.'³⁶³

Fortunately for Ram and his supporters, the Punjab government obliged his request. For 1931/2, a 27.4% remission of the revenue demand was granted. This generous remission - far greater than anything granted in UP, the Bombay Presidency, or Madras Presidency - was

³⁵⁵ Ian Talbot, 'The Punjab Under Colonialism', *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 14 (2007), 5.

³⁵⁶ A *maund* is approximately 37kg.

³⁵⁷ Rothermund, *Depression*, 82.

³⁵⁸ A *seer* is approximately 1.25kg.

³⁵⁹ CR, 'Fall in Prices of Agricultural Produce', 455.

³⁶⁰ Rothermund, *Depression*, 82.

³⁶¹ CR, 'General Discussion on the Budget', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 474-5.

³⁶² Banditries.

³⁶³ CR, 'General Discussion on the Budget', 475-6.

essentially political, as the British saw Punjab as essential to maintaining their rule and countering the growing nationalist movement.³⁶⁴

Indeed, following a breakdown in relations with Lord Irwin about India's constitutional future in late-1929,³⁶⁵ civil disobedience agitations had been launched by Congress on a mass scale after Gandhi's famous Salt March from 12 March to 6 April 1930,³⁶⁶ which encouraged many Indian peasants to defy the British monopoly on salt production, established by the India Salt Act of 1882, by making their own salt.³⁶⁷ This calmed down only after the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1931 with the latter forced to make a number of concessions to the former including, *inter alia*, the release of vast numbers of political prisoners which appeared to legitimise protest against the Raj.³⁶⁸

In Punjab, however, where the local *Satyagraha* Committee approved all provincial Congress Committees to manufacture salt and make presentations to the people to instruct them in it on 17 April,³⁶⁹ was one of the least receptive provinces to Gandhian civil disobedience, c.1930-1,³⁷⁰ especially in rural areas. The activity that did take place, moreover, was mostly confined to the picketing of urban shops.³⁷¹

Despite this, Ram took advantage of the theoretical threat that Gandhi's campaigns posed to the Punjabi countryside. To him, doing so was important given that by July 1930 the Congress was once again agitating for non-payment of land revenue in rural areas, although such campaigns, which directly affected Rohtak, were quickly repressed.³⁷² Thus, in a debate on 1 December 1931 on whether a 50% remission in land revenue and the water rate 'be granted in

³⁶⁴ Rothermund, *Depression*, 95.

³⁶⁵ Misra, *VCT*, 129.

³⁶⁶ Brown, *Disobedience*, 99ff; Guha, *Gandhi*, 335ff.

³⁶⁷ Rothermund, *Depression*, 101ff; Brown, *Disobedience*, 116ff.

³⁶⁸ Brown, *Disobedience*, 153ff; Guha, *Gandhi*, 375-6, 385, 423.

³⁶⁹ D. R. Grover, *Civil Disobedience Movement in the Punjab* (New Delhi, 1987), 54-5.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-2; Brown, *Disobedience*, 145-6.

³⁷¹ Brown, *Disobedience*, 146; Grover, *Disobedience*, 63ff, 78ff, 89ff, 96ff, 104.

³⁷² Grover, *Disobedience*, 92-3, 99-100.

respect of all *kharif*³⁷³ crops of 1931',³⁷⁴ Ram stated that 'we all know that there is a threat of civil disobedience ... being held out by a person who is very highly respected throughout India, at whose word people are going to jail by the thousand'.³⁷⁵ He therefore insinuated that, if these campaigns were resumed, 'agriculturists' would join the nationalist movement if their grievances were not addressed.³⁷⁶

The Punjab government was sympathetic to Ram's case, or at least willing to support Punjabi peasants during hard times, given that it ended up granting subsequent remissions. Thus, from c.1930-33, it introduced a special remission of Rs. 265 lakhs in land revenue and irrigation duty, on top of Rs. 200 lakhs granted to compensate for damaged crops within the existing framework. In 1934, it also approved a remission of approximately Rs. 20 lakhs in land revenue specifically for Ram's south-east Punjabi heartland.³⁷⁷

Ram himself, who was arguably the key player in the Unionist Party, as Husain had been appointed to the Viceroy's Executive Council in 1930,³⁷⁸ meanwhile, was thinking about how the provincial Government would fund the revenue remissions for which he had advocated. He therefore wrote 15 articles for *The Tribune* entitled 'Need for Radical Retrenchment' between June and August 1931.³⁷⁹ Ram's rationale for austerity was as follows:

The Punjab is essentially and chiefly a province of peasant proprietors. The main burden of Provincial taxation falls on this class. ... it is the agricultural classes which have been hit hardest by the present economic depression ... It was felt that if the slump in the price of agricultural produce continued as is feared on very reasonable grounds, a grave situation might arise in the event of the present scale of "agricultural" taxation being allowed to continue in force.³⁸⁰

³⁷³ Autumn.

³⁷⁴ *PLCD*, vol. XX, (1931), 261, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250418112858/https://www.pap.gov.pk/uploads/verbatim/text/en/pb-legis-council-debates-vol-xx-1931.pdf>, Accessed 17/09/25).

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 293; cf. Grover, *Disobedience*, 116-19ff.

³⁷⁶ *PLCD*, vol. XX, 293.

³⁷⁷ Sharma, 'Unionist Party', 170; Tanwar, *Power*, 72.

³⁷⁸ CR, 'Appreciation of the Services of ... Fazl-i-Husain', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 445-6.

³⁷⁹ CR, 'Need for Radical Retrenchment [RR] I-XV', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 521-603.

³⁸⁰ CR, 'RR', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 1, 520-1.

Ram's articles were therefore an attempt to influence the Punjab government as well as to provoke a more public debate on the subject.³⁸¹ The suggestions he proposed in the series, moreover, were a wide-ranging array of cuts affecting most government departments including Forests, Criminal Tribes, Reclamation, Land Revenue and Irrigation,³⁸² general administration and the administration of justice,³⁸³ prisons and the police,³⁸⁴ education,³⁸⁵ the medical department,³⁸⁶ and even agriculture.³⁸⁷ However, within the latter, Ram interestingly argued that its schemes for 'co-operative credit offers little scope for retrenchment' and so he only made two, small suggested cuts.³⁸⁸ But this restraint did not stop him from rounding off his series of articles with calls for retrenchment in industries,³⁸⁹ fisheries,³⁹⁰ public works³⁹¹ and some additional 'minor departments.'³⁹²

Summing up his case, Ram argued his proposals were necessary to avoid serious economic collapse and assured his readers that the recommended cuts aimed to minimise hardship for lower-level public servants, following common practices across India.³⁹³ He also added a further, and stirring, justification for the cuts when he insisted, with strong 'agrarian populist' overtones, that:

[W]e must bear in mind that India is an extremely poor country where two square meals a day is not a very familiar luxury in the case of a large proportion of the population. People born with a silver spoon in their mouth, who have never known want, may not be able to realize the full extent of the poverty which exists in the country ... To crown all this, the crushing burden of a costly administration - the costliest in the world - weighs most heavily on a section of the population least able to bear it ...³⁹⁴

³⁸¹ CR, 'RR-I', 523.

³⁸² CR, 'RR - V', 534-42.

³⁸³ CR, 'RR - VI-VII', 542-53.

³⁸⁴ CR, 'RR - VIII', 553-9.

³⁸⁵ CR, 'RR - IX', 559-64.

³⁸⁶ CR, 'RR - X', 564-72.

³⁸⁷ CR, 'RR-XII', 572-85.

³⁸⁸ CR, 'RR - XII', 585-6.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 586-7.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 587-8.

³⁹¹ CR, 'RR - XIII', 588-95.

³⁹² CR, 'RR- XIV', 596-8.

³⁹³ CR, 'RR - XV', 599.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 600.

In highlighting the disproportionate taxation burden on rural Punjab, and advocating for spending cuts, Ram was therefore increasingly taking aim at the urban bureaucrat, in addition to the hated money lender he had railed against hitherto, as a key 'elite' antagonist of the villager. This is clear from a piece in *Bechara Zamindar* where Ram observed that a sum was 'levied on all the residents of the village on grounds of chowkidara,³⁹⁵ and the salaries of the watchmen are paid from this amount'. However, Ram asserted, 'the chowkidars do not perform any duty in the villages ... [and] are appointed and dismissed only by the officers'. Why therefore, he asked, should Punjabi 'zamindars' be made to pay for them given that 'they serve the government at the cost of the village community'?³⁹⁶

Just like subsequent 'agrarian populists' like Ranga and Singh in the 1950s and 1960s, although they operated in a different context with their own specific targets (see chapters 3-4), Ram therefore expressed strong hostility to the 'bureaucrats residing on Shimla Hills',³⁹⁷ in addition to 'urbanites' who spent their free time walking along 'cool roads, beautiful parks and gardens of Lahore', contrasting their condition with that of 'a section of our population ... [that] looks towards others for its bare bread.'³⁹⁸

Regarding Ram's 'Radical Retrenchment' articles, meanwhile, it is difficult to judge whether they had a direct, material effect in Punjab. Nevertheless, significant cuts totalling approximately Rs. 1 crore³⁹⁹ and 75 lakhs were made across various government departments. For example, the Irrigation department under Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan (1892-1942), a leading Unionist PLC member, cut Rs. 75 lakhs alone, including Rs. 32 lakhs from salaries.⁴⁰⁰

But while the securing of remissions and imposing cuts were important, the question remained of what a more positive response to the economic distress caused by the Depression in

³⁹⁵ A *chowkidar* is a village watchman.

³⁹⁶ CR, 'Flogging a Dead Horse', [1933] in Singh, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, 166.

³⁹⁷ Now in Himachal Pradesh.

³⁹⁸ CR, 'This is the Reality', [1933] in Singh, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, 137.

³⁹⁹ A *crore* is ten million.

⁴⁰⁰ Tika Ram, *Chhotu Ram*, 20; Iftikhar Haider Malik, *Sikandar Hayat Khan* (Islamabad, 1985), 44-5.

Punjab would look like. This was particularly important with respect to the issue of rural debt given that Punjab's total debt had grown from Rs. 90 crores in 1921 to Rs. 135 crores in 1929, which amounted to Rs. 45 per cultivated acre and Rs. 104 per head of those living from agriculture in that year.⁴⁰¹

Needless to say, the collapse in agricultural prices in Punjab after 1930 further aggravated the rural debt problem because credit and cash were lacking in the countryside which meant that demand from peasants for loans rose sharply to pay their revenue, *inter alia*.⁴⁰² Unfortunately, however, money lenders, generally speaking, were unwilling to issue capital and, when they did, they insisted on security rates less generous than usual.⁴⁰³

Punjab's cooperative credit movement, meanwhile, was in unprecedented difficulty as only 720 societies opened in 1930-31, down from 871 in 1929-30. And agricultural credit societies only lent approximately Rs. 80 lakhs to their members, in 1931/32, compared to Rs. 140 lakhs the previous year, with loans mostly approved only for 'productive spending', for example on cattle and fodder, rather than on marriages and re-paying old debts.⁴⁰⁴

Ram's proposed remedy for Punjab's severe rural debt problem started to emerge in March 1932 when he was appointed by the Punjab Government, who were concerned with the diminished capacity of Punjabi peasants to pay land revenue, to a committee to evaluate the recommendations of the forthcoming report of the Rural Indebtedness Inquiry Committee.⁴⁰⁵

On the report, Ram approved of its suggestion that the insolvency process be 'simplified', however he criticised its proposal that, *inter alia*, 'the entire landed property [of] an agriculturist being made available for the satisfaction of a debtor's debts'.⁴⁰⁶ Also, Ram expressed his support its recommendation that debt conciliation boards be established. However, he attacked its

⁴⁰¹ *Report of the Punjab Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, 1929-30*, vol. 1 (Lahore, 1930), 16.

⁴⁰² Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Lenders and Debtors', *Studies in History*, 1, 2 (1985), 340.

⁴⁰³ Sir Malcolm Darling, *Wisdom and Waste in the Punjab Village* (London, New York, etc, 1934), 319.

⁴⁰⁴ *Report on the Working of Co-operative Credit Societies in Punjab* (Lahore, 1932), 1, 31-3.

⁴⁰⁵ 'Rural Indebtedness in the Punjab', *The Times of India (TI)*, 11 April 1933; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 252.

⁴⁰⁶ CR 'Rural Indebtedness', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 2, 165.

corresponding stipulation that ‘the debts payable under an agreement ... are recoverable as arrears of land revenue by the collector’. To Ram, both proposals were potentially damaging to zamindar interests, especially the latter, which ‘would make the position of debtors twenty times worse than it is now.’⁴⁰⁷

Ram’s response to the report is, however, more interesting for its practical suggestions to ensure lasting legislative success. Indeed, he urged the Punjab government to improve marketing infrastructure, observing that ‘zamindars’ were often exploited by shopkeepers. Thus, he called for more commission shops to be ‘started under the auspices of the Co-operative Department.’⁴⁰⁸

For context, the number of these shops, which were designed to give peasants better rates for their produce, had only increased by one since the year 1929/30.⁴⁰⁹ Only through them, by keeping peasants ‘clear of further liabilities’, Ram argued, would their ‘assets ... be improved so as to enable ... [them] to avoid debts in the ordinary course of life.’⁴¹⁰ He clearly, therefore, saw a place for cooperative solutions in relieving Punjabi peasant debt, specifically in marketing, which undermines one scholar’s claim that he rejected cooperatives as a potential solution to rural indebtedness.⁴¹¹

Additionally, Ram concluded his piece by suggesting another long-term solution, namely, to develop rural industries:

It is very necessary that the zamindar should have something other than agriculture as a means for augmenting his income during the slack season ... I remember one particular cottage industry which proved very helpful to the zamindars ... There was a system of doling out small quantities of silk worm seed ... a zamindar who took out an ounce of silk worm seed was in the course of six weeks able to earn as much as Rs. 200 ... Similarly, other minor cottage industries may be started ...⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 165-6.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁰⁹ *Report on the Working of Co-operative Credit Societies*, 43-4.

⁴¹⁰ CR, ‘Rural Indebtedness’, 172.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Datta, *Identity*, 97.

⁴¹² CR ‘Rural Indebtedness’, 173.

Ram's views reflect a rudimentary version of ideas used by his fellow Jat and 'agrarian populist' intellectual Charan Singh, (see chapter 4), to oppose the Nehruvian developmental regime in 1950s India, which stressed the importance of developing rural rather than heavy industries so that development policy would benefit rural classes, especially peasant proprietors, by finding work both for them and the rural unemployed and under-employed. Sahajanand and Ranga, moreover, were also strong supporters of developing rural industries (see chapters 2-3).

However, in the immediate short term, Ram's priority was for preparing legislation to address the debt issue. However, a bill implementing the 1933 Rural Indebtedness Inquiry Committee Report's suggestions would not be introduced into the PLC until the following year. On 20 March 1934, Sir Henry Craik (1876-1955), the Finance Member in the Punjab Executive Council,⁴¹³ presented a motion to the PLC to facilitate the circulation of the government's Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Bill.⁴¹⁴

Introducing the government's bill, Craik declared that 'the position as regards rural credit in this province is practically such that debts cannot be repaid'. Their bill, therefore, aimed to find the most effective solution to the problem without severely damaging or dismantling the existing rural credit system.⁴¹⁵ His motion was immediately carried and the bill's legislative introduction caused considerable controversy. In Ram's arresting phrase, it drove the 'whole Shylock fraternity into a great ferment'.⁴¹⁶ As he reported, 'meetings' were 'held all over the province to protest against this bill' with 'all these societies and organisations which are under the control of Urban Hindus ... busy in denouncing this measure.'⁴¹⁷

All this frenetic activity, to Ram, furthermore, was essentially unnecessary because the bill was 'innocuous' and 'if examined calmly ... will be found to furnish no occasion for any uneasiness

⁴¹³ *PLCD*, vol. XXIV, (1934), 1

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250630023208/https://www.pap.gov.pk/uploads/verbatim/text/en/pb-legis-council-debates-vol-xxiv-1934.pdf>, (Accessed 17/09/25).

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1068.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1069.

⁴¹⁶ CR, 'Punjab's Relief from Indebtedness', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 2, 303.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.

on the part of the creditor'. Commenting on three key aspects of the government's bill, Ram observed that:

The amendments proposed in the Usurious Loans Act are very colourless and the maximum rates of interest which shall not be regarded as exorbitant are unusually high ... More over [*sic*] the jurisdiction of the [Conciliation] Boards can be easily nullified by the refusal of creditors to submit to it. The modifications prepared in the law relating to the arrest and desertion of debtors are more eye wash ...⁴¹⁸

Ram's tone here implies a critical reading of the government's bill. Nevertheless, he did ultimately support its underlying principles and concluded his article with several conditions for any debt relief legislation to be 'efficacious'. In his list, these were 'immunity from personal arrest and detention', 'exemption from attachment of all property', *inter alia*.⁴¹⁹ In fact, Ram's commitment to relieving agriculturist debtors, and not just those among his base of Jat Hindu peasant proprietors, a significant departure from his early years as a Jat identitarian, c.1912-20, is clear from his argument that 'if the Bill is beneficial at all it will benefit all debtors alike ... [as] at least 90 per cent of the population among Hindus and Sikhs no less than among Muslims is indebted'.⁴²⁰ But in Ram's Rohtak district, communal conflict was by now erupting regularly as indebted Muslim landowners saw their land increasingly alienated to Jat agriculturist money lenders. Clashes over mosque construction on disputed land became the key flashpoint in one particularly important 1933 disturbance.⁴²¹

Back in the PLC, despite the barrage of criticism noted by Ram, the Punjab government remained committed to the legislation's underlying principles. On 26 June 1934, Mr D. J. Boyd (1877-1953), a successor to Craik as Finance Member, introduced a motion to pass the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Bill to a select committee with Ram among its members.⁴²² In so doing, Boyd sharply observed that the 'critics of the Bill fall into two main categories - the agriculturist

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 305.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 306-7.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 306.

⁴²¹ Chowdhry, *Politics*, 101-6.

⁴²² *PLCD*, vol. XXV, (1934), 80,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250630023251/https://www.pap.gov.pk/uploads/verbatim/text/en/pb-legis-council-debates-vol-xxv-1934.pdf>, (Accessed 17/09/25).

debtor and the money-lending creditor'. On the former, according to Boyd, they 'regard it [the Bill] as a poor affair ... without any real power to relieve agriculturists of their debt ... [therefore] they would like ... a complete cleaning of the slate'.⁴²³ Interestingly, Boyd warned against doing this by pointing to the recent experience of Romania, among other countries, which had attempted this course but 'within two years ... the conditions of the zamindars of Roumania [*sic*] was as bad as it was before'.⁴²⁴

On the latter, meanwhile, Boyd observed that they 'regard it [the Bill] as undermining the sacredness of contract'. Regardless, he asked anyone attracted by this line of argument to appreciate that:

In the present position we have a practical moratorium ... [and] if this Bill operates to bring debtor and creditor together and to make possible a reasonable composition of debts, then we may hope ... the business of financing agriculture will commence again ...⁴²⁵

Boyd's appeals, however, failed to prevent a furious debate on the bill. Narendra Nath, Ram's old rival, who had also been appointed to the select committee,⁴²⁶ severely criticised it on the basis, according to a write-up in the *Civil & Military Gazette*, that it would torpedo Punjab's 'non-agricultural moneylenders' on 28 June.⁴²⁷ In response, Ram described the Bill as 'long overdue, pointing out that a measure similar to the one before the House was already in operation in the Central Provinces'.⁴²⁸ Unionist strength in the PLC, and Boyd's support, however, made the passage of the motion inevitable.⁴²⁹

Following the conclusion of this debate on 28 June, there was a period of relative calm until Boyd presented the select committee's report on the Bill to the PLC on 18 October.⁴³⁰ The process of debating the bill then got underway when, on 26 October, Boyd moved a motion in

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 80-1; cf. Beneš, *Peasant War*, 241-2.

⁴²⁵ *PLCD*, vol. XXV, 82.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁴²⁷ 'Relief of Indebtedness Bill', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 2, 307; cf. *PLCD*, vol. XXV, 318-23.

⁴²⁸ 'Relief of Indebtedness Bill', 307; cf. *PLCD*, vol. XXV, 330; Rothermund, *Depression*, 126.

⁴²⁹ *PLCD*, vol. XXV, 361-3.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 384.

the PLC facilitating the scrutiny of the Bill.⁴³¹ While doing so, Boyd acknowledged that the bill had undergone several amendments and insertions.⁴³² He also expressed his gratitude that Ram and the Unionists were not going to take issue with them because, if they had, re-circulation of the Bill would have been required, *inter alia*, for purposes of obtaining legal opinion.⁴³³ Thus, Boyd told the PLC that the government ‘was anxious to see it passed into law as soon as possible, because the state of indebtedness among the agriculturists of the Punjab is such as to demand such alleviation as Government can give.’⁴³⁴

Ignoring Boyd’s pleas once again, Narendra Nath quickly intervened to introduce an amendment that the bill be circulated for public comment with a deadline of 15 February 1935.⁴³⁵ On 30 October, Ram made a very long speech in opposition to Nath’s amendment which contained a forensic discussion of various technical aspects of the Bill.⁴³⁶ After speaking for two hours, Ram concluded his speech on 1 November with the following appeal:

It has been suggested so far that this Bill is concerned it makes no provision for Government helping in the recovery of debts. I understand that ... [the government] is engaged in hammering out ... a scheme under which the Co-operative Societies may be able to come to the rescue of debtors within certain limits. Of course [*sic*] it will not be easy or practicable for the Co-operative Department to take over all the debts ... In the circumstances the best thing would be to pass this legislation and not to insist on the motion for circulation.⁴³⁷

This extract shows that while Ram was interested in cooperative solutions to Punjab’s debt problem, as we have seen, and British officials were clearly sympathetic to their use also, he still prioritised the passage of debt relief legislation. However, clause 7 of the final Act would exempt cooperative societies from the Act’s eventual limits on interest chargeable on loans.⁴³⁸ Also, when the PLC specifically discussed clause 7, Ram had insisted that it was:

⁴³¹ Ibid., 667.

⁴³² Cf. CR, ‘The Debt Relief Bill’, in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 2, 335-7.

⁴³³ *PLCD*, vol. XXV, 667.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 668.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 671.

⁴³⁶ CR, ‘The Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Bill’, in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 2, 337-77.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 376-7.

⁴³⁸ *Relief of Indebtedness Act*, 4.

[A]bsolutely wrong to place co-operative societies on the same footing as private moneylenders ... [because] the only agency which can supply the legitimate requirements of the credit of the agricultural production is the Co-operative Department.⁴³⁹

Cooperatives of this kind, which were essentially in the domain of services to support peasant proprietors rather than in production, would also largely be championed by subsequent 'agrarian populists' like Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh (see chapters 2-4).

Back to the PLC debates of 30-1 October, the house subsequently dismissed Nath's amendment as Ram had willed.⁴⁴⁰ The month of November saw a series of further contentious debates about the bill in the press and PLC.⁴⁴¹ On the latter, perhaps the single most important development occurred on 23 November given it represented a significant setback for Ram who, until then, had mostly steered the discussions in the Unionists' favour.

The relevant amendment had been moved by Mr J. D. Anderson, the Punjab Government's Legal Remembrancer, and directly affected clause 29 of the Bill, which outlined the bill's provisions regarding the principle of *damdupat*,⁴⁴² by seeking to define the word 'debtor' in the context of that clause as someone:

[W]ho owes a debt and ... who ... earns his livelihood mainly by agriculture, and is ... a landowner, or tenant of agricultural land or a servant ... of a land-owner or of a tenant of agricultural land ... who earns his livelihood as a village menial paid in cash or kind for work connected with agriculture.⁴⁴³

Ram's objection to this definition was essentially that it did not use the LAA to define an 'agriculturist', or to 'those persons who have been declared by the Government as members of depressed classes among Hindus'.⁴⁴⁴ It, therefore, gave too much power to the courts to determine whether an applicant was a 'debtor' and thus it may be difficult for 'debtors, who will

⁴³⁹ *PLCD*, vol. XXV, 965-6.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 853.

⁴⁴¹ CR, '*Karj Kanun ka Virodh*' ['Opposition to the Debt Law'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 5, 200.

⁴⁴² A concept in Hindu jurisprudence limiting the amount of interest chargeable on a debt.

⁴⁴³ *PLCD*, vol. XXV, 1105.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1115.

be agriculturists in most cases, to prove their claim' as they generally did not keep accounts and thus would lack written evidence to prove their status.⁴⁴⁵

But Ram's position also had a philosophical aspect too. Indeed, he had argued as far back as 1923 that the 'biggest issue facing Hindus is the upliftment of the 'untouchable' castes', a position he had argued essentially on demographic grounds because if 'untouchables' left the fold, then the Hindu community would stagnate in population, and also on the religious/moral grounds of it being wrong in the eyes of God to treat these communities unjustly.⁴⁴⁶ As Ram stated to the PLC, 'our desire [is] to make the definition of 'debtor' of universal' because 'what is beneficial for agriculturists is also beneficial for non-agriculturists.'⁴⁴⁷

However, Ram's attempt to insert the LAA's definition of an 'agricultural tribe' into the clause was voted down.⁴⁴⁸ The same fate then greeted his attempt to include the 'depressed classes among Hindus' within the definition contained in the amendment too.⁴⁴⁹ Boyd had led the opposition to the amendments, rejecting Ram's proposals as 'ridiculous' because they would create needless class divisions. He also claimed incorporating the 'depressed classes' was unnecessary, as the bill already aimed to support indebted peasants.⁴⁵⁰

But despite his failure to impose his own definition of 'debtor' into the legislation, the silver lining was that the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Bill was now on the verge of passing. This achievement came soon after on 30 November when it was approved by the PLC.⁴⁵¹ On 17 December, the Bill was returned to the PLC 'for reconsideration' by the Punjab Governor Sir H. W. Emerson (1861-1962).⁴⁵² On 21 December, the PLC then passed several amendments, proposed by Emerson, which included, *inter alia*, re-defining 'excessive interest' as being greater

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 1116.

⁴⁴⁶ CR, '*Hinduon Hoshiyar Ho Jao aur Achhooton ko Gale Lagao*' ['Hindus Be Mindful and Embrace the Untouchables'] in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 4, 534-7.

⁴⁴⁷ *PLCD*, vol. XXV, 1119.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 1126.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 1127-8.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 1122-3.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 1216.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 1228.

than 12% on secured loans or 9% compound interest per year with the corresponding figures for unsecured loans being 18.75% and 14% respectively.⁴⁵³ Afterwards, Emerson gave his assent on 4 February, 1935, which was followed by the Earl of Willingdon (1866-1941), the Viceroy of India (1931-6)'s stamp of approval on 5 April. The bill then officially became law in Punjab from 8 April.⁴⁵⁴

Regarding the Act's purpose, Ram had claimed in his 30 October-1 November PLC speech that it was for 'smaller landholders and smaller people'. He justified this by, *inter alia*, pointing to 'clauses 3 and 4 of the Bill', which were 'restricted in their application to those whose debts amount to Rs. 250 or more and the value of whose ... property does not exceed Rs. 1,500'. Also, he emphasised the Rs. 10,000 debt limit in the conciliation boards, insisting that 'certainly those people who owe Rs. 10,000 or less cannot be classified as big landholders.'⁴⁵⁵

Indeed, the final act confirms Ram's claims, as clauses 3 and 4 did reform insolvency petition rules by lowering the debt threshold to Rs. 250 and raising the property value eligible for modified summary administration to Rs. 2000 - thus slightly higher than the Rs. 1500 Ram quoted above. Additionally, the Rs. 10,000 debt limits in the conciliation boards also made its way into the final Act.⁴⁵⁶

Ram's characterisation of the legislation therefore appears plausible. By 1939, 25 boards had been established in Punjab, with 22,237 applications 'settled amicably' and 20,772 cases involving approximately Rs. 21 million still pending. Some settlements were generous - for instance, in Rohtak, one debt was reduced from Rs.1,000 to Rs.50.⁴⁵⁷ As Alan Mitchell, 'Additional Secretary' in the Punjab Development Department, concluded:

The establishment of Debt Conciliation Boards has undoubtedly afforded some appreciable relief to the debtor classes ... [and] the boards are not favourably looked upon by dishonest money-lenders, as their business has been hampered by them.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 1363ff, 1372ff.

⁴⁵⁴ *Relief of Indebtedness Act*, 1.

⁴⁵⁵ CR, 'The Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Bill', 360-1.

⁴⁵⁶ *Relief of Indebtedness Act*, 2-3, 6.

⁴⁵⁷ *Report on the Working of Debt Conciliation Boards in the Punjab* (Lahore, 1942), 1-3.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 5.

Even so, the 1934 Act, amended in 1940 as overseen by Ram in response to alleged money lender evasions such as failure to attend board hearings to block final settlements,⁴⁵⁹ did little for Punjab's poorest peasants. After all, despite the inclusion of agricultural labourers in its 'debtor' definition, the Act lacked a definition of 'depressed Hindus', which Ram had failed to secure in clause 29 as discussed above. Thus, Ram's goal for the bill to help 'people who seldom got two meals a day and slogged unsheltered under the burning sun' was not fully realised.⁴⁶⁰

IV: Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Chhotu Ram first used 'agrarian populist' ideas in India, pitching the 'zamindar' primarily against the urban money lender to advocate for land reform, cooperatives, and parliamentary democracy. Unlike later figures, however, his ideology was closely aligned with British 'imperial populism', as colonial authorities supported rural stability to maintain control over Punjab. Nevertheless, 'agrarian populism' in Punjab gained real traction only during the economic crisis of the Great Depression, which Ram skilfully leveraged.

Unlike later 'agrarian populists' in India, therefore, Ram's 'agrarian populism' was distinctive in that it was a loyalist rather than a nationalist creed and was thus relatively moderate, particularly when compared with Sahajanand's 'agrarian populism', as we will see in the next chapter. This was in large part a result of the specificities of the land revenue system in Punjab. The absence of the *zamindar* - a focal point of anti-imperial criticism in India since the nineteenth century⁴⁶¹ - meant that it was not possible to mobilise peasants against the large aristocratic landlord in Punjab, leading instead to the identification of the, often Hindu, moneylender (*bania*) as the peasant's chief antagonist. Thus, if we were to construct a provisional typology of 'agrarian populism' in India, Ram's 'agrarian populism', which might be termed the 'populism of imperialists and their allies', would be placed on its right-hand side.

⁴⁵⁹ CR, 'Relief of Indebtedness', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 3, 233-4ff.

⁴⁶⁰ 'Relief of Indebtedness Bill', 311-12; cf. *PLCD*, vol. XXV, 326.

⁴⁶¹ Cf. Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (New Delhi, 1966), ch. 9.

Chapter 2: ‘*Kisan Mazdoor Raj*’ (Peasant and Worker Rule): Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (1889-1950) and the Radicalisation of Agrarian Populism in Late Colonial India, c.1934-50

This chapter explores the ‘agrarian populist’ ideology of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, whose Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) was ‘the biggest *kisan* movement in pre-1947 British India’.¹ It seeks to extend the study of Sahajanand and the BPKS beyond the political history of Indian Communism where scholars have stressed Sahajanand’s conversion to several Communist Party of India (CPI) policy positions by 1942 as symptomatic of its growing influence in peasant politics.² Thus, it uses ‘agrarian populism’ to analyse Sahajanand’s intellectual and political journey (c.1889-1950), tracing his transformation from ascetic to Bhumihar Brahmin reformer, Gandhian Congress politician, and eventually a leftist influenced by socialism and Marxism, culminating in his founding of the All-India United Kisan Sabha (AIUKS) after breaking from both the CPI and Congress.

Presently, there are three key interpretations of Sahajanand’s ideology. In 1961, Hauser essentially traced an evolution from ‘Gandhism’ to ‘Communism’ in Sahajanand’s thought, c.1920-42. This narrative has been very influential in the historiography, broadly accepted to different extents by various scholars,³ and is particularly useful for interpreting the end of Sahajanand’s ‘Gandhian’ phase in 1934 when he rejected this ideology out of outrage regarding Gandhi’s reaction to the continued oppression of the peasantry by *zamindars* during the aftermath of the Bihar Earthquake of 1934, as well as the contexts for Sahajanand’s exploration of Marxist literature during his imprisonment for protesting India’s involvement in WWII,

¹ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India* (New Delhi, 1983), 276.

² Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 207, 384-5; Sanjay Seth, *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics* (New Delhi and India, 1995), 168-9; Kiran Maitra, *Marxism in India* (New Delhi, 2012), 197.

³ Petra Heidrich, ‘The Indian Village as Perceived by Peasant Leaders in Late Colonial India’, in Bernt Glatzer (ed.), *Essays on South Asian Society, Culture and Politics II* [1998] (Berlin, 2021), 73-6; Dalip Kumar ‘Introduction’ in idem (ed.), *Rural Development and Social Change* (New Delhi, 2007), xv-xvi, xxii-xxx; G. C. Pandey, ‘Swami Sahajanand and His World View’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 71 (2010-2011), 678ff; Sho Kuwajima, *Peasants and Peasant Leaders in Contemporary History* (New Delhi, 2017), 23-49; Ramchandra Pradhan, ‘Introduction’, in idem (trans.), *The Struggle of My Life* (New Delhi, 2018), xxiv-xxxvii; Pratyush Kumar, ‘Swami Sahajanand Saraswati’, in Himanshu Roy and Mahendra Prasad Singh (eds.), *Indian Political Thought* (Uttar Pradesh, 2020), ch.24; idem, ‘A *Kisan* at the Crossroads of History, Politics and Law’, *Südasiens-Chronik - South Asia Chronicle*, 11 (2021), 189ff; Nilanshu Ranjan, *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati* (New Delhi, 2021), 23-79.

c.1940-2, where he met and was inspired by many Communists.⁴ To Hauser, c.1934-44, Sahajanand therefore moved from an expansive, inclusive definition of the peasantry which included all rural classes who made a living from an agriculture to a staunch Leninist definition which prioritised the interests of the poor peasant above all else, supporting his position with quotes from a 1944 address that Sahajanand made to the AIKS and an important pamphlet published by him in 1949.⁵

Hauser's narrative, however, suffers from two problems. First, while it is true that Sahajanand did prioritise the plight of the agricultural labourer in 1944, the programme of his AIUKS movement, also released in 1949, claimed to represent tenants, landless labourers and small landholders too, which implies a more 'agrarian populist' understanding of the peasantry in the sense of championing the interests of the peasantry as a whole while simultaneously acknowledging class distinctions within it.⁶ In his own later work too, Hauser himself came to the conclusion that while 'socialist and Marxist ideology' certainly influenced Sahajanand, they never formed a 'consistent pattern' within his overall 'thinking and action'.⁷ So, an 'agrarian populist' frame might be useful to clarify it further.

Despite this, several post-Hauserian writers made a more forthright case for Sahajanand as a Communist ideologue. In 1983, Das drew on similar evidence from Sahajanand's writings, used by Hauser, to position him as a champion of the 'rural proletariat' by 1949.⁸ In 1997, Pandey developed the 'Communist' case by asserting that Sahajanand supported the idea of a 'peasant-worker state',⁹ a concept rooted in Marxist-Leninist thought, the theoretical foundation of which can be traced back to Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), while its practical implementation was a key

⁴ Walter Hauser, *The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha* [1961] (Abingdon, 2019), 114-19, 131-2, 181-5.

⁵ Ibid., 47-8; cf. V. I. Lenin, 'Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question', [1920] in idem, *Collected Works (CW)*, vol. 31 (Moscow, 1966), 152-64.

⁶ *Programme and Charter of Kisan Demands* (Bihar, 1949), 10-11.

⁷ Walter Hauser, 'From Peasant Soldiering to Peasant Activism', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 47, 3 (2004), 416.

⁸ Arvind N. Das, *Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar* (New Delhi, 1983), 136-8, 141-2.

⁹ Vaidyanath Pandey, *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati* (Allahabad, 1997), 111.

feature of Bolshevik policy following the October Revolution of 1917.¹⁰ Also, in 2003-4, Sharma dubbed Sahajanand as an ‘ideologue of revolution’ who endorsed V. I. Lenin (1870-1924)’s slogan of ‘peace, land and bread’ plus Mao Zedong’s (1893-1976)’s vision of a ‘four class front’ to achieve a Communist revolution in India after independence.¹¹

However, an issue with taking such a strong view of Sahajanand as a Communist is his decision to cut ties with the CPI in 1945, which was the product of disagreement about foreign policy regarding the ‘Pakistan demand’ of the Muslim League, which makes his stance on the matter somewhat similar to Chhotu Ram’s, the latter being a strong opponent of the partition of India until his death in 1945,¹² and his anger at the growing dominance of Communists within the AIKS, which Pandey did acknowledge.¹³ Also, while Sahajanand did predict that a revolution would erupt in India by 1957 (see section III below), Sharma concedes that Sahajanand was opposed to the use of violence, beyond self-defence, to achieve it quite unlike Lenin or Mao.¹⁴ In such circumstances, an ‘agrarian populist’ view of Sahajanand’s ideology might be a way to account for his undeniable, albeit inconsistent, interest in Marxist-Leninism.

In a similar spirit, Jaffrelot has argued that Sahajanand should be placed in India’s ‘*kisan* politics’ tradition.¹⁵ He therefore refers to Sahajanand’s important, unpublished work *Khet Mazdoor* (1941),¹⁶ in which he observes, following Hauser, that Sahajanand used the term *kisan* synonymously with the term *khet mazdoor*¹⁷ with the former often used to describe both types of peasants. Thus, Jaffrelot argues that this broad definition allowed Sahajanand to defend the interests of the rural upper caste elite via the BPKS. This suggests to Jaffrelot that Sahajanand,

¹⁰ Prabhat Patnaik, ‘Engels and the Worker-Peasant Alliance’, *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 10, 1 (2021), 184-197.

¹¹ Raghav Sharan Sharma, ‘*Bhumika*’ [‘Introduction’] in idem, *Rachnawali*, vol. 1, 36-7; idem, *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati* [2004] (New Delhi, 2022), 319.

¹² “Jinnah’s Two Nation Theory is Absurd”, in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 3, 236; cf. Tika Ram, *Chhotu Ram*, 70-6; Talbot, ‘Collaborators’, 86; Chowdhry, *Politics*, 229-30.

¹³ Pandey, *Sahajanand*, 230.

¹⁴ Sharma ‘*Bhumika*’, 37; idem, *Sahajanand Saraswati*, 320.

¹⁵ Jaffrelot, *Silent Revolution*, 271, 302.

¹⁶ Walter Hauser (ed.), *Sahajanand on Agricultural Labour and the Rural Poor* (New Delhi, 1994) cited in *ibid.*, 302n173.

¹⁷ Agricultural labourer.

like Ram, was most interested in representing the interests of peasant proprietors despite his attempt to speak for wider rural society, hence his description of Sahajanand as an ideologue of ‘*kisan* politics’, an ideology of said constituency.¹⁸ Thus, given that Jaffrelot’s ‘*kisan* politics’ approach can be reasonably considered to be associated with ‘agrarian populism’ (see chapter 1), this suggests that further enquiry into ‘agrarian populist’ aspects of Sahajanand’s ideology is justified.

In this chapter, I follow Jaffrelot in presenting an alternative reading of Sahajanand’s ideology by treating it as a form of ‘agrarian populism’, which Sahajanand expressed perhaps most powerfully through his ‘*kisan and mazdoor raj*’¹⁹ in the AIUKS programme of 1949.²⁰ The chapter therefore outlines Sahajanand’s background, his campaign for Brahmin status for Bhumihars, and rise as BPKS leader (c.1889-1929). It then covers his shift toward ‘agrarian populism’ (c.1929-40), advocating radical land reform but preferring extra-parliamentary action, and remaining unclear on cooperatives. Finally, it analyses how by the 1940s his ideology matured, embracing democratic principles and cooperatives in line with ‘agrarian populist’ principles.

The chapter argues that Sahajanand’s ideology was, like Ram’s, a form of ‘agrarian populism’, which pitched an undifferentiated peasantry against *zamindar* and other ‘elite’ interests, drew on Hindu jurisprudence plus Gandhian thought and was expressed via specific proposals for land reform, cooperatives and democratic participation, with the latter trait, by 1949, essential to distinguishing Sahajanand’s views from those then taken by the CPI. However, it should be acknowledged that Sahajanand’s ‘agrarian populism’ was more radical, at least rhetorically, than Ram’s given his stronger interest in Gandhism, which meant the ‘imperial populism’ that strongly influenced Ram largely disappeared as an ‘adjacent’ concept in Indian ‘agrarian populist’ ideology, plus cooperative and collective farming, which also went beyond Ram’s suggestions to use them to provide credit and marketing facilities for peasants. In fact, the programme of Sahajanand’s AIUKS proposed that holdings larger than 50 acres be taken by the government,

¹⁸ Jaffrelot, *Silent Revolution*, 276, 302-4n173.

¹⁹ Peasant and worker rule.

²⁰ *Programme*, 9ff.

with some of the seized land used for state-supported collective farming, where poor farmers and landless labourers would be resettled.²¹

The main reason for this difference, although Sahajanand's personal, religious background, the context of Bihar's political economy which was far more economically challenging than Punjab's given the existence of extensive unfree labour,²² his exposure to Communist writing and ideas in prison and his initial, more nationalist interest in Gandhian *satyagraha* when compared to Ram were important factors too, was the relatively more 'socialist' political climate in Bihar when compared to Punjab. For example, the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), India's first democratic socialist party was founded in Patna, the capital of Bihar, in 1934.²³ J. P. Narayan (1902-1979), moreover, a Bihari and leading CSP theoretician, had founded a Bihar Socialist Party three years earlier following his return to India in 1929 after his studies in the United States during which he had become a committed Marxist.²⁴ What is more, the CSP supplied many volunteers to Sahajanand's BPKS which began almost immediately after its inception.²⁵

Furthermore, by the late 1930s, Sahajanand's movement gained traction in Bihar, largely due to the Great Depression's specific, local economic impact. Bihar, a *zamindari* region governed by the Bengal Tenancy Act (BTA) of 1885 - as it was originally part of Bengal Presidency (1699-1937) - which protected tenants who had been working their land for at least twelve years under the same landlord from arbitrary rent hikes following agrarian unrest during the Pabna Peasant Uprisings (1873-6).²⁶ The provisions of the BTA therefore ensured that *zamindars* could only increase the rents of their tenants at a rate of less than 1% per year. So, while falling agricultural prices during the Great Depression threatened tenants' ability to pay rent, the BTA protected

²¹ Ibid., 21.

²² Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories* (Cambridge, 1990), 1-33.

²³ Thomas A. Rusch, 'Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1955), 145, 330-1.

²⁴ Jawaid Alam, *Government and Politics in Colonial Bihar* (New Delhi, 2004), 147; cf. Ajit Bhattacharjee, *Jayaprakash Narayan* (New Delhi, 1975), 34-61.

²⁵ Zareer Masani, 'Radical Nationalism in India', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1976), 100-1.

²⁶ Kalyan Kumar Sengupta, 'Agrarian Disturbances in 19th Century Bengal', *IESHR*, 8, 2 (1971), 192-212; Dietmar Rothermund, *Government, Landlord, and Peasant in India* (Wiesbaden, 1978), 98-101, 104; Peter Robb, *Ancient Rights and Future Comfort* (Richmond, 1997), 165-7.

them from eviction unless they defaulted for three consecutive years.²⁷ Thus, unlike in Punjab where it was immediately felt (see chapter 1), the Depression only truly began to disrupt the Bihari countryside after 1933, by which time the BPKS was starting to find significant support among disgruntled tenants.

I: 'The Expansion of the Brahmin Lineage': Social Reform, Gandhism and Sahajanand's Establishment of the BPKS, c.1889-1929

This section examines the contexts behind Sahajanand's founding of the BPKS in 1929, arguing that it emerged from tensions between Brahmanism and Gandhism in his thought. His early 'agrarian populism' reflected his strong Gandhian nationalism and religious practice, while the BPKS's initial purpose of supporting Congress candidates for the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council (BOLC) provided an early expression of an 'agrarian populist' ideology developed more fully in the 1930s-40s.

Sahajanand was born at Deva village, Ghazipur district in the eastern portion of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh²⁸ close to the border with Bihar in 1889.²⁹ Ghazipur was described as an 'essentially agricultural' district which had 'undergone a marked improvement' by a colonial officer in 1909.³⁰ However, the district had recently suffered from several famines,³¹ including a very serious one in 1900 which, Sahajanand says, 'was so fierce that people starved to death all around the region.'³²

Indeed, from 1899-1900, the Indian monsoon was very weak and had caused severe drought in Western, Central and Southern India, although the North-Western Provinces was also plagued by food shortages and high prices.³³ Many residents of Sahajanand's village, however, survived it

²⁷ Rothermund, *Relations*, 104-5; idem, *Depression*, 116.

²⁸ Reorganised as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh in 1902.

²⁹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 3; cf. Ram Chandra Sharma, 'Mere Chacha, Unke Gaam' [My Uncle, His Village] in V. C. P. Chaudhary et al. (eds.), *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati* (Patna, 1990), 23-6.

³⁰ H. R. Nevill, *Ghazipur* (Allahabad, 1909), 81, 118.

³¹ Ibid., 48-53.

³² Pradhan, *Struggle*, 6.

³³ *Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1901* (Calcutta, 1908), 4-8; cf. B. M. Bhatia, *Famines in India* (London, 1963), 250-62; Maneck Kharshedji Bhabha, 'The Famine of 1899-1900', (Unpublished M.Litt. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1974), chs. 2-3.

on account of a large harvest that year of *arhar*,³⁴ which, alongside maize, was the main crop grown in his village.³⁵

The position of Sahajanand's family in the local economy, moreover, is revealed by his account in his autobiography, written c.1940 with an addendum added in 1946,³⁶ of his *upanayana*³⁷ in 1901. The priest was to instruct Sahajanand in the *Gayatri Mantra*.³⁸ But his family 'hardly knew' the hymn because they were 'simple peasants'.³⁹ This point is confirmed by Sahajanand's account of his ancestors and their 'economic circumstances':

My family had a small zamindari, and the rest of the land was under our direct ownership for self-cultivation ... during the days of my grandfather, the economic condition of my family was comfortable. However, ... the land was divided into six or seven parts because of several partitions in the family ... The real worth of our family zamindari was very meagre ... cultivation was the main source of subsistence.⁴⁰

Sahajanand was thus from a landowning family but one that appears to have been essentially immiserated by the early twentieth century. Sahajanand gives the following account of the 'genealogical origins' of his caste:

Jujhautiyas ... are a branch of Kanyakubja Brahmins.⁴¹ Jujhautiya or Jajakshukti⁴² was their earliest habitat ... The people of that area were known for their fighting zeal and outstanding acts of bravery. Jujhautiya Brahmins are mostly found around Hamirpur, Lalitpur, and Jhansi regions.⁴³

However, Sahajanand chose not to follow his ancestors into cultivation. Influenced by an inspirational *pandit*,⁴⁴ Sahajanand decided to become an ascetic. Sahajanand gives the following account of his decision to take *sannyas*⁴⁵ in 1907:

³⁴ Pigeon pea.

³⁵ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 6.

³⁶ Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, xxiii-xxiv, 3n5.

³⁷ A Hindu ritual marking the beginning of the student stage of life. Cf. W. J. Johnson, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford 2009), 333.

³⁸ A Sanskrit hymn from the Rig Veda. Cf. Dominik A. Haas, *Gāyatrī: Mantra* (Vienna, 2023), 1-5.

³⁹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 16-17.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁴¹ Cf. R. S. Khare, 'The Kānya-Kubja Brahmins and Their Caste Organization', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 16, 3 (1960), 348-367.

⁴² Located in the Bundelkhand region of Central and North India, which is now split between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

⁴³ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 5. Hamirpur, Lalitpur, and Jhansi are all now in Uttar Pradesh.

⁴⁴ Religious teacher.

⁴⁵ Renunciation.

I do not remember the exact date, but I reached Aparnath Math⁴⁶... There was an old *sannyasi* called Achyutanand Giri Ji Maharaj in Aparnath Math who was well versed in Sanskrit and philosophy. They requested him to take me as his disciple ... Thus, I became a *sannyasi* ...⁴⁷

With that, Sahajanand became a Dasanami *sannyasi*.⁴⁸ Consequently, he left his home village of Deva and conducted his ascetic wanderings.⁴⁹ Upon completion, he learnt Sanskrit followed by deep immersion in the *shastras*.⁵⁰

During his studies in Varanasi, c.1909-10, Sahajanand met Swami Purnanand Saraswati, a *sannyasi* from a Bhumihar Brahmin family in Ghazipur district.⁵¹ Through him, Sahajanand met some eminent Bhumihar Brahmin families who provided him with funds while he studied. This paved the way for Swami Purnanand's biggest contribution to Sahajanand's future development, which was his decision in 1914 to introduce him to the Bhumihar Brahmin Mahasabha (BBM) (1896-1929), which was aiming to secure official recognition of Brahmin status for the community,⁵² thereby enabling Sahajanand's emergence as a social reformer.⁵³

Sahajanand's activism was, however, limited by its promotion of 'elite' interests. After all, his first BBM meeting in Ballia was 'dominated by rajas and maharajas, and they were totally committed to the British raj'.⁵⁴ Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Bhumihars⁵⁵ had become one of the dominant castes of the Bhojpuri region⁵⁶ in terms of control over land and villages.⁵⁷ For example, in Sahajanand's home district of Ghazipur, the Bhumihars cultivated 11.5% of the agricultural land by c.1906-7.⁵⁸

⁴⁶ In Benares (now Varanasi). Cf. Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, 44n14.

⁴⁷ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 28-9.

⁴⁸ Shaivite ascetic. Cf. G. S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadbis* (Bombay, 1953), 78-127.

⁴⁹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 30-72; cf. Sondra L. Hausner, *Wandering with Sadbis* (Bloomington, 2007), 1-34.

⁵⁰ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 73ff. The *shastras* are important Hindu scriptures that guide law, ethics, and daily conduct.

⁵¹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 83.

⁵² Purushottam Kumar, 'Bhumihars Struggle for Brahmin Status', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 56 (1995), 739-41; Aniket Nandan and R. Santosh, 'Associational Structures and Beyond', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 33, 4 (2020), 667-8.

⁵³ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 98.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵⁵ Also known as Babhans.

⁵⁶ The Bhojpuri region encompasses parts of eastern UP, Bihar, Jharkhand and Nepal.

⁵⁷ Gyan Pandey, 'Rallying Around the Cow', in Guha, *SS II*, 68-9; cf. Prakash, *Bonded Histories*, ch. 3.

⁵⁸ Nevill, *Ghazipur*, 118.

But despite the efforts of BBM petitioners, the Bhumihars were classified as an ‘other caste of twice born rank’ in the 1901 Census,⁵⁹ because despite their claim that:

[T]hey are Brahmans who have given up the priesthood and taken to landholding ... in the eyes of the general Hindu public they constitute a separate caste.⁶⁰

The 1911 Census, moreover, stated that:

It appears very probable that the Babbhans were originally Brahmans ... [but] they are [now] regarded as a community distinct from Brahmans ... [so] it ... [is] impossible to grant their request to be recorded simply as Brahmans.⁶¹

To support the Bhumihar’s claim to Brahmin status, Purnanand suggested that Sahajanand write a mythical history of the community based on the myth of Parashurama.⁶² But Sahajanand made use of his study of the *shastras*, particularly the *Manusmriti*,⁶³ to argue that agricultural work was acceptable Brahmanical practice. In his book *Brahmarshi Vansh Vistar* (1925), first published in 1916 under a different title,⁶⁴ Sahajanand made an important distinction between self-cultivated and non-self-cultivated agriculture to support his case:

Agricultural commerce and lending money at a specified interest are part of two types of agricultural work: (1) Swayamkrit, which is done with one’s own hands, and (2) Asyamkrit, which is done by others.... The first of these ... can be done by Brahmins in times of crisis. But the second type is considered Brahmin.⁶⁵

On this basis, Sahajanand therefore argued that ‘getting the farming done by someone else ... is the duty of the Brahmin’.⁶⁶ Furthermore, he also made an additional distinction that acknowledged differences within the Brahmin communities of northern India when he said that both *yachak*⁶⁷ and *ayachak*⁶⁸ Brahmins had existed since ancient times and that the Bhumihars fell

⁵⁹ *Census of India, 1901*, vol. 6, Part I (Calcutta, 1902), 373.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁶¹ *Census of India, 1911*, vol. 5, Part I (Calcutta, 1913), 444.

⁶² Pradhan, *Struggle*, 102. Parashuram is the sixth avatar of Vishnu, and a Brahmin too, according to Hindu mythology.

⁶³ Olivelle, *Manu*, 185-6.

⁶⁴ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 108-10.

⁶⁵ Sahajanand, ‘*Brahmarshi Vansh Vistar*’ [*The Expansion of the Brahmin Lineage*] [1925] in Sharma, *Rachnawali*, vol. 1, 217.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁶⁷ Brahmins who beg for religious gifts.

⁶⁸ Non-begging Brahmins.

into the latter category. The main aim of Sahajanand's text was therefore to write a history of the Bhumihar community that provided them with an identity as *ayachak* Brahmins.⁶⁹

Sahajanand's book was thus motivated out of a duty to his caste relations. While he was a Jujhautiya Brahmin, his community had established conjugal and dining links with the Bhumihars.⁷⁰ Indeed, Sahajanand was dismayed by seeing the Bhumihars' lack of confidence in their identity when compared to other Brahmins of the region from more prestigious lineages. At the Ballia meeting of the BBM, Sahajanand recounted how he:

[H]ad no idea that they considered themselves as being so low and inferior among the broad category of Brahmins ... [and] just wondered whether I could do something to instil a sense of self-pride in them.⁷¹

Thus, Sahajanand took it upon himself to prove that 'the Bhumihars were as good Brahmins as the Maithils⁷² or Kanyabubjas [*ji*]' by proving the existence of familial ties between Bhumihars and the established Brahmin communities of his region. Conducting fieldwork in Darbhanga, Bhagalpur, and Munger districts of Bihar, among others, Sahajanand found 'numerous cases of marriage relationships'.⁷³ The results of these investigations thus make up the bulk of Sahajanand's first book and were central to his case that the Bhumihars were Brahmins.

Following his book's publication, Sahajanand moved to Vishwambharpur village, Ghazipur district, where he sought to preach its findings. While his residence was explicitly requested by the local *zamindars*, Sahajanand quickly discovered that his services had been sought because the *zamindar's gurus*⁷⁴ from the established Brahmin castes had abandoned them out of anger at the growth of the Bhumihar Brahmin movement. After all, it threatened the standing of the Maithil Brahmins in particular.⁷⁵ Hence Sahajanand's eventual realisation that because these *zamindars*

⁶⁹ Sahajanand, '*Brahmarshi*', 155, 186-7; cf. Pradhan, *Struggle*, 99-100; Amrita Tulika, 'An Intellectual Biographical Sketch of a Peasant Leader', (Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1986), 75.

⁷⁰ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 100.

⁷² Cf. Carolyn Henning Brown, 'Raja and Rank in North Bihar', *MLA*, 22, 4 (1988), 757-8ff; Anshuman Pandey, 'Recasting the Brahmin in Medieval Mithila', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2014), *passim*.

⁷³ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 107.

⁷⁴ Spiritual advisers.

⁷⁵ V. C. P. Chaudhary, '*Bhumika*' [Introduction] in idem, *Sahajanand Saraswati*, xiv.

were worried about what the desertion of their *gurus* might do for their reputation, they had merely ‘invited me to live there for their religious self-protection.’⁷⁶

Consequently, Sahajanand moved to Kotwa-Narayanpur village, Bihar in 1918. There, his concerns moved beyond the BBM. By reading English language newspapers sent to him by associates in Patna, he started to develop an interest in nationalist politics. As a result, Sahajanand learned of the ‘Rowlatt Act, ... the Punjab Martial Law, and ... the Amritsar Congress held in the wake of these events.’⁷⁷

The Rowlatt Act, 1919, discussed in chapter 1, had recently provided the British Raj with new powers to crack down on political dissent in the wake of WWI. The ‘Punjab Martial Law’ was introduced after subsequent events took a chilling turn in Punjab when Indians peacefully protesting against the Act, as well as the arrests of Punjabi Congress stalwarts Dr. Satya Pal (1885-1945) and Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew (1888-1963) on 10 April, were massacred by troops under the command of General Reginald Dyer (1864-1927) at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar on 13 April.⁷⁸ The Amritsar Congress, held from December 1919 to January 1920, finally, saw Gandhi assume his ‘share of responsibility in the drawing-up of the Congress report on the Punjab wrongs.’⁷⁹

For Sahajanand, reading about these events was crucial in turning his attention towards all-India politics. Via *Pratap*, a Hindi newspaper founded in 1913,⁸⁰ Sahajanand also learned of the death of B. G. Tilak (1856-1920), one of the dominant Congress leaders before Gandhi,⁸¹ in 1920.⁸² Sahajanand also took a strong interest in debates within Congress following Gandhi’s decision to announce the Non-Cooperation campaign on 1 August.

⁷⁶ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 110-11.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 111.

⁷⁸ Kim A. Wagner, *Amritsar* (New Haven, 2019), xviii, xxii, 74ff.

⁷⁹ M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography* [1925-9] (New Haven, 2018), 741.

⁸⁰ Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2002), 38.

⁸¹ Robert E. Upton, *The Thought of Bal Gangadhar Tilak* (Oxford, 2024), 1-3.

⁸² Pradhan, *Struggle*, 111-12.

The Non-Cooperation campaign, (see chapter 1), sought to build on the Rowlatt *satyagraha* and Khilafat movement as well as, Gandhi hoped, allow for the righting of the ‘wrongs’ committed by the British in Punjab. After its official approval at a ‘special session’ of the Congress in Calcutta in September 1920,⁸³ Sahajanand read the ‘full account’ of the proceedings and offered essentially uncritical support for Gandhi.⁸⁴

Thus, when Gandhi, alongside Maulana Muhammad Ali (1878-1931) and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), key Muslim allies of Gandhi during the movement,⁸⁵ visited Patna in early December as part of a nationwide tour to prepare Indians for it, Sahajanand listened carefully to their speeches. Enchanted, he quickly sought and secured a meeting with Gandhi, finding himself in private audience with him on 5 December. At the meeting, Sahajanand worried that Muslim leaders might leave the national movement if the Ottoman Caliphate issue was resolved, leaving Hindus to fight alone. Gandhi assured him this wouldn’t happen, expressing faith in his Muslim colleagues’ loyalty.⁸⁶

Sahajanand must have been satisfied with Gandhi’s response as he attended the Nagpur Congress in late December 1920.⁸⁷ This meeting was made necessary by the fact that although the Calcutta vote was a victory for Gandhi, there were questions about whether it was legitimate given that it had been conducted at a ‘special session’ of Congress.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, the Nagpur Congress, as Sahajanand recalls, ‘approved and passed the Non-Cooperation without much opposition’,⁸⁹ which then stirred up considerable enthusiasm in Bihar. The Bihar delegates returned home greatly inspired and organised many campaigns including, *inter alia*, temperance and *swadeshi* drives.⁹⁰ Sahajanand, meanwhile, quickly threw

⁸³ Brown, *Power*, 262-89; Guha, *Gandhi*, 117-19.

⁸⁴ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 112.

⁸⁵ Faridah Zaman, ‘Beyond Nostalgia’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27, 4 (2017), 631-2; Sohal, *Secular*, 4-5.

⁸⁶ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 114-16.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁸⁸ Brown, *Power*, 272; Guha, *Gandhi*, 129-32.

⁸⁹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 119-20.

⁹⁰ K. K. Datta, *History of the Freedom Movement in Bihar*, vol. 1 (Patna, 1957), 321-2; Brown, *Power*, 259-60; Alam, *Politics*, 91ff; Lata Singh, *Popular Translations of Nationalism* (New Delhi, 2012), chs. 2-3.

himself into it in Bihar's Buxar district. There, he campaigned for the boycott of the BOLC following the Maharaja of Hathwa, a large Bhumihaar landlord who collected taxes from over one thousand villages in Saran district,⁹¹ and his announcement to stand for election to it.⁹²

As context, we note that, and by contrast to Punjab where the 'imperial populist' provincial government sought to enfranchise the landed peasantry and their leaders like Chhotu Ram via the Unionist Party (see chapter 1), the colonial state relied more heavily on *zamindars* in provinces such as Bihar,⁹³ and in other Indian provinces such as Madras and UP too (see chapters 3-4). This orientation persisted after the Government of India Act of 1919. Thus, the appointment of Satyendra Prasanna Sinha (1863–1928) - a lawyer from a prominent Bengali *zamindari* family⁹⁴ - as governor of Bihar and Orissa in 1920 symbolised the colonial preference for 'elite' landed interests,⁹⁵ which were also strongly represented in the BOLC thereafter.⁹⁶

Seeking to embarrass the Maharaja, Sahajanand therefore travelled to the Buxar countryside to persuade the locals not to vote for him.⁹⁷ However, the boycott failed, and the Maharaja secured his election to the council. Undeterred, Sahajanand returned to Buxar to assist Congress efforts to distribute one lakh *charkehas* across the nation by July 1921. Thus, Sahajanand arranged for cheap *charkehas* to be brought from Simri village to Buxar where he began the work of encouraging the locals to start making their own clothes.⁹⁸

Reflecting on his early political career, Sahajanand says he was a 'full-blooded Gandhian'. This is clear from Sahajanand's decision to adopt a rigorous personal spinning timetable thereby following Gandhi's example.⁹⁹ By June 1921, Sahajanand was also working hard to raise funds

⁹¹ Anand A. Yang, *The Limited Raj* (Berkeley and London, 1989), ch. 6.

⁹² Pradhan, *Struggle*, 121; cf. Anand A. Yang, *Bazaar India* (Berkeley, 1998), 192.

⁹³ Yang, *Limited Raj*, ch. 4 and *passim*.

⁹⁴ S. V. FitzGerald, 'Sinha, Satyendra Prasanno, first Baron Sinha', revised by Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-36112>, (Accessed 25/09/25).

⁹⁵ Alam, *Politics*, 61.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁷ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 122.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 124; cf. Nikhil Menon, 'Gandhi's Spinning Wheel', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 81, 4 (2020), 644-662.

for Congress' Tilak Swaraj fund, stating proudly that 'Buxar ... superseded Arrah in the fund collection' despite it being a 'much smaller town'. In November 1921, Sahajanand then re-located to Ghazipur where he continued this work.¹⁰⁰

Ultimately, Sahajanand's dedication to Gandhism was so strong that it landed him in jail. In December 1921, the British government passed a criminal law amendment prohibiting the recruitment of political activists. After writing a letter to his district magistrate to express his intention to challenge the amendment, Sahajanand was arrested soon after his return to Ghazipur on 2 January 1922.¹⁰¹

Following three short stints in prison in Varanasi, Faizabad and Lucknow,¹⁰² Sahajanand was released in early January 1923. The political situation by then was, however, 'quite depressing'.¹⁰³ The Non-Cooperation campaign was over because, as discussed in chapter 1, Gandhi called it off in response to the Chauri Chaura incident. Consequently, Gandhi's decision, when combined with his subsequent arrest in March and sentence to six years in prison, meant the British had regained the initiative in Indian politics.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, Congress was also paralysed by divisions between 'pro-changers' and 'no-changers' regarding party policy on entry to the British legislative councils with the former in favour and the latter against.¹⁰⁵ In these debates, the 'pro-changers', led by C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru (1861-1931), lawyers and relatively 'moderate' Congressmen who had been critical of Gandhi but nevertheless supported the Non-Cooperation movement,¹⁰⁶ lost a key vote at the Gaya session of Congress in late 1922 to endorse council entry. But despite this setback, Das and Nehru decided to set up a new party, the Swaraj Party, first referenced in chapter 1, within

¹⁰⁰ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 125-6.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 134-5.

¹⁰² Varanasi, Faizabad and Lucknow are all now in Uttar Pradesh.

¹⁰³ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 161.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, *Power*, 309, 348; Guha, *Gandhi*, 197-9.

¹⁰⁵ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 161.

¹⁰⁶ Ray, *C. R. Das*, 151-75; B. R. Nanda, *Motilal Nehru* [1964] (New Delhi, 1979), 114-17.

Congress on 1 January 1923 which would seek election to the councils and conduct political agitation on more constitutional lines thereafter.¹⁰⁷

Sahajanand, a ‘no-changer’, continued his fundraising work for the Congress in Ghazipur, c.1923-4. Around this time, he was also elected as a member from Ghazipur for the UP Provincial Congress Committee (UPCC) and the All-India Congress Committee (AICC).¹⁰⁸ These developments notwithstanding, and Gandhi’s early release from prison in February 1924,¹⁰⁹ Sahajanand recalls that during these years Congress ‘was not much involved in political work.’¹¹⁰

As a result, Sahajanand refocused his attention on the Bhumihar Brahmin movement. But due to Sahajanand’s recent pre-occupation with nationalist campaigning, his ‘opponents’ within the Brahmanical priestly establishment had ‘started dominating and oppressing the Bhumihar Brahmins’ by refusing to do *purohiti*¹¹¹ work for them, including administering last rites, marriages and sacred thread ceremonies.¹¹²

Determined to resist this ‘attack on the self-respect of Bhumihars’,¹¹³ Sahajanand therefore prepared a new book called *Karmakalap* (1926), which was intended to allow anyone who read it to better understand the Sanskritic scriptural provisions on the rituals associated with the *upanayana*, marriages, etc,¹¹⁴ and thus help them become a ‘*karmakandi*?’¹¹⁵ At the same time, he says he was also addressing ‘hundreds’ of meetings in UP and Bihar where he gave a ‘clarion call to the Bhumihar Brahmins to take up *purohiti* work’. This latter suggestion attracted strong opposition from within the Bhumihar camp itself. In Sahajanand’s words:

¹⁰⁷ S. R. Bakshi, *Swaraj Party and Indian National Congress* (New Delhi, 1985), 32-3, 33-5, 39.

¹⁰⁸ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 164-5.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Disobedience*, 14; Guha, *Gandhi*, 208.

¹¹⁰ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 172.

¹¹¹ Priestly.

¹¹² Pradhan, *Struggle*, 172-3.

¹¹³ Ibid., 173.

¹¹⁴ Sahajanand, *Karmakalap* [A Compendium of Actions] [1926] (Patna, 1948), 1.

¹¹⁵ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 109. A *karmakandi* is a practitioner of Hindu rituals.

[T]he old group of Bhumihaar *zamindars*, the so-called rajas and maharajas, who were putting the greatest hurdle on our new path ... [because] they thought that *purohiti* work was an inauspicious work and it was also below their dignity.¹¹⁶

Indeed, the BBM contained several of UP's and Bihar's largest landlords including Raja Chandeshwar Prasad Narayan Singh (1901-1994) of Maksoodpur, Maharaj Kumar Shri Gopal Sharan Singh (1883-1953) of Tekari, both of whose estates were in Gaya district, and the *zamindars* of Dharhara in western Patna district. Sir Ganesh Dutt (1868-1948), the Minister for Local Self-government in the Bihar government, who regularly served as President of the BBM, also supported this group and their interests both in the BBM and in the BOLC.¹¹⁷

Despite this, Sahajanand sought to challenge the *zamindar* faction within the BBM by securing a proposal endorsing the *purohiti* movement. At the UP BBM meeting in Varanasi in summer 1925, Sahajanand's resolution favouring *purohiti* work was approved with support from younger members. However, at a second meeting in Khalilabad in December, his opponents succeeded in overturning it. But Sahajanand fought back, and his resolution was endorsed at the summer 1926 BBM meeting in Patna.¹¹⁸

However, Sahajanand's *purohiti* drive was also provoking renewed opposition from the priestly Brahmanical establishment. In 1927, Sahajanand learned of a reported 'ban' in the *pathshalas*¹¹⁹ of Varanasi, and elsewhere, on teaching Bhumihaar youth Sanskrit. This was a huge problem for Sahajanand and his followers because without a working knowledge of Sanskrit, newly minted Bhumihaar priests would be unable to independently administer marriage and funeral rites.¹²⁰

More broadly, the Sanskrit language ban was also existential for Sahajanand's cause because Brahmins needed to know Sanskrit to prove their high caste status. After all, Brahmins had represented only 7.66% of the population in Sahajanand's home district of Ghazipur in 1901.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 173.

¹¹⁷ Walter Hauser, 'Swami Sahajanand and the Politics of Social Reform', *Indian Historical Review*, 18, 1-2 (1991-2), 70; Alam, *Politics*, 71ff.

¹¹⁸ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 173-4, 180.

¹¹⁹ Religious schools.

¹²⁰ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 182.

¹²¹ Nevill, *Ghazipur*, 86.

Also, Sahajanand was personally aware of the *Manusmriti*'s prescriptions regarding the duty of Brahmins to provide social leadership,¹²² which he had acknowledged years earlier in a pamphlet written on the basis of the findings of his first book.¹²³ Compounding the problem further still was that the Bhumihars had neglected studying Sanskrit, another issue which Sahajanand was cognisant of in another pamphlet also published after his first book.¹²⁴

Sahajanand's solution was to establish an *ashram*¹²⁵ in Bihta, Bihar where he would personally teach Sanskrit to Bhumihar youth seeking to become priests. With the help of Sitaram Das, a Bhumihar and a Ramanandi¹²⁶ who provided the land, buildings and initial funding, Sahajanand established a Sanskrit school at the *ashram*, the curriculum of which would focus on the *Veda* and other Sanskrit texts, in 1927. In a coup, he also secured support from the BBM when a trust was established to hold the property. Although its committee included figures with whom he had a history of fraught relations, namely Sir Ganesh Dutt. Nevertheless, the Shri Sitaram Ashram trust made possible the teaching of Sanskrit to Bhumihar Brahmin boys free of charge for the foreseeable future.¹²⁷

A perhaps unexpected outcome of Sahajanand's establishment of an *ashram*, however, was that his attention was soon diverted towards the plight of the peasantry. Bihta, where Sahajanand's *ashram* was located, was in Bihar's West Patna district which was well-known for its grain market where peasants, from up to 50 miles away, would sell their goods.¹²⁸ While living there, Sahajanand was exposed to peasants, many of whom were Yadavs, a large, predominantly agricultural community of *shudra*¹²⁹ rank in Bihar, and North India more broadly whose caste

¹²² Olivelle, *Manu*, 192.

¹²³ Sahajanand, 'Brahmin Samaj ki Sthiti?' [*The Condition of Brahmin Society*] [n.d.] in Sharma, *Rachnavali*, vol. 1, 48.

¹²⁴ Sahajanand, 'Jhooth Bhay aur Mithya Abhiman' [*False Fear and False Pride*] [n.d.] in Sharma, *Rachnavali*, vol. 1, 132; cf. Pradhan, *Struggle*, 109.

¹²⁵ Monastery.

¹²⁶ A member of a large Vaishnava sect.

¹²⁷ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 183-4.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 201.

¹²⁹ Worker.

deity is the Lord Krishna,¹³⁰ which may have attracted them towards Sahajanand's Sitaram *ashram*,¹³¹ telling their 'tales of woes' as they passed his ashram to the market.

Specifically, Sahajanand learned of serious allegations about the *zamindars* of the surrounding region who were accused of extorting forced labour from the family members of peasant tenants, 'stamping' their crops so they could not be threshed without their consent and setting unfair rents by deliberately over-assessing crop yields which could result in peasants having to give their livestock, etc, to pay the rent demanded. Sahajanand was also particularly disturbed by reports that the *zamindar's*

[P]restige was always on a high pedestal, so ... that if he were sitting on the chair, the peasant would have to sit on the floor with folded hands ... even if the peasant was a Brahmin.¹³²

In response, Sahajanand conducted 'peasants' meetings at some places in the [West Patna] area'.¹³³ The result was that, on 4 March 1928, Sahajanand established the West Patna Kisan Sabha. Clearly, a degree of political instrumentalism was motivating this work given Sahajanand's recollection that:

I was aware that Patna district was divided into two parts for the purposes of the council's elections ... Eastern Patna and Western Patna. Western Patna was the area of my activities ... Election to the council used to generate a lot of heat among the people. I thought that if our Kisan Sabha started working in the area, we could derive some advantages during the election time as well.¹³⁴

Commenting on this passage, Hauser argues that it shows that Sahajanand understood how cooperation across various levels and spheres of political activism creates a dynamic and mutually reinforcing process.¹³⁵ However, it also showcases an important change in Sahajanand's thought where he had, c.1928, moved from Gandhian *satyagraha* towards the paying of more attention towards the parliamentary and constitutional domain of politics, albeit through

¹³⁰ The eighth avatar of Vishnu.

¹³¹ William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley and London, 1996), 131-33; cf. Lucia Michelutti, "We (Yadavs) are a Caste of Politicians", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 38, (1-2) (2000), 43-71.

¹³² Pradhan, *Struggle*, 202-3.

¹³³ Ibid., 203-4.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 204.

¹³⁵ Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, 343-4, 344n8, 431n8.

Congress, which reflects an ‘agrarian populist’ agenda of constitutionalism/parliamentarianism notwithstanding the fact that Sahajanand nor his organisation was to stand for election directly at this time.

Even so, Sahajanand’s new attention to electoral politics had other inspirations. Indeed, it was conducted within a Gandhian ideological framework given that its overall aim was to find a way to ameliorate relations between *zamindars* and peasants:

I had to be most careful in not creating any more conflict between the peasants and zamindars, both of whom were our own people. Even if some conflicts between these two groups were to arise, we would be able to settle them by removing any misunderstanding between them ... that was the policy of the Congress ... [and] that was what Gandhiji was striving for.¹³⁶

For context, Gandhi’s own approach to organising peasants had been powerfully articulated in opposition to the outbreak of no-rent agitations among peasants participating in the Non-Cooperation movement in UP in 1921.¹³⁷ On 18 May, responding to reports that peasant non-cooperators were said ‘to have stopped the supply of water ... to their Zamindars ... and even suspend payment of the rent due to them’, he asserted forcefully that:

While we will not hesitate to advise the Kisans when the moment comes, to suspend payment of taxes to the Government, it is not contemplated that at any stage of Non-cooperation we would seek to deprive the Zamindar of their rent ... the Kisan movement must be confined to the improvement of status of the Kisans and the betterment of the relations between the Zamindars and them ... [they should] scrupulously ... abide by the terms of their agreement with the Zamindars ... not try to uproot it by violence or without previous reference to [them] ... [and conduct] friendly discussion with the Zamindars and [make] an attempt ... to arrive at a settlement ... [because] our capacity for Swaraj depends upon solving without reference to, or intervention of, the Government, all the varied and complex problems ... [that] must arise in ... nations like ours.¹³⁸

And, although the Non-Cooperation Movement ultimately failed, Gandhi’s agrarian strategy returned with Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950)’s successful 1928 Bardoli *satyagraha*, which forced a

¹³⁶ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 203.

¹³⁷ W. F. Crawley, ‘Kisan Sabhas and Agrarian Revolt in the United Provinces 1920 to 1921’, *MAS*, 5, 2 (1971), 108-9.

¹³⁸ M. K. Gandhi, ‘The Zamindars and the Ryots’, in idem, *Young India 1919-22* [1921] (Madras, 1924), 742.

government enquiry into a revenue hike.¹³⁹ No doubt, Sahajanand later praised Patel's campaign, which had been 'fought through satyagraha to protect the interests of the Bardoli peasants.'¹⁴⁰

The overall Gandhian rationale underpinning Sahajanand's West Patna Kisan Sabha was thus that conflicts within Indian society, especially class-based, risked undermining the nationalist movement. So, they should be avoided in favour of mobilising rural areas against the colonial state, rather than fight internal battles within them, let alone use violence to settle either. As Sahajanand put it:

Congress has always stood for ... class conciliation and not class conflict ... my own thinking during those days was on similar lines.¹⁴¹

However, as Sahajanand moved closer towards the peasants, his relations with the BBM hierarchy deteriorated. Thus, c.1928-9, Sahajanand fell out with Sir Ganesh Dutt after the Bihar government 'superseded' the Gaya District Board following allegations of 'mismanagement and mishappenings' against its Congress party chairman. In the summer of 1929, Sahajanand was also greatly angered by news that Dutt was yet again seeking to become president of the BBM at its upcoming meeting in Munger. Concerned that he would use the presidency to pit Bhumihaar support against Congress in the upcoming elections, Sahajanand's opposition to Dutt caused so much disruption that Dutt stopped the meeting and called the police. As a result, the BBM was dissolved and never reassembled.¹⁴²

Now, Sahajanand's attention turned exclusively towards the peasantry. Matters came to a head when the British government introduced the Bihar Tenancy Amendment Bill into the BOLC on 17 September 1929.¹⁴³ This bill was essentially a compromise, introduced after at least two previous bills earlier in the decade had failed to amend the BTA,¹⁴⁴ in order to address its lacuna

¹³⁹ Brown, *Disobedience*, 29-34.

¹⁴⁰ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 219.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 204.

¹⁴² Ibid., 209-15.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 216.

¹⁴⁴ BOLCD: *Official Report*, Vol. 20, No. 11, (1929), 805-6, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/saoa.crl.34648387.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A7f770988843a719cfea405f687e458da&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&initiator=search-results&acceptTC=1, (Accessed 11/09/25).

of leaving the right to transfer occupancy holdings to ‘custom’ which gave the *zamindars* the right to refuse applications from tenants who wished to transfer their occupancy right.¹⁴⁵ In this context, the 1929 bill, *inter alia*, proposed a transfer fee of 8% to the *zamindar* in exchange for 10% of their estates being legally recognised as *zirat*¹⁴⁶ as much of their land was classified as *bakasht*¹⁴⁷ which, in theory, meant the *zamindar* only had the right to cultivate the land although, in practice, it was often worked by tenant farmers. Thus, reclassification of *bakasht* lands as *zirat* lands would clarify unambiguously that they belonged to the *zamindar*.¹⁴⁸

Outraged, the Bihari Swarajist council member Ram Dayalu Babu approached Sahajanand in November 1929 regarding the expansion of his West Patna Kisan Sabha as it would not be possible to oppose the proposed legislation in the BOLC due to a lack of a Congress majority there.¹⁴⁹ To understand the strong Swarajist interest in this issue, we should note that many supporters of C. R. Das, the co-founder and first President of the party who hailed from Bengal, were middle class Bengalis in possession of occupancy rights. Hence Das’ vigorous participation in debates regarding the amendment of the BTA in Bengal before his death in 1925.¹⁵⁰ In Bihar, meanwhile, Swarajist council members often advocated for reform of the BTA at their meetings in the mid-1920s, especially the granting of the occupancy *ryot* the right to transfer their holding.¹⁵¹ Naturally, they wanted to win the votes of this constituency.¹⁵²

In collaboration with leading Bihari Congressmen, Sahajanand was therefore named President of the nascent BPKS at the Sonapur *mela*¹⁵³ in Bihar’s Saran district in November 1929. In his speech, Sahajanand ‘emphasised the necessity of Kisan Sangathan’¹⁵⁴ and denounced the Bihar

¹⁴⁵ Rothermund, *Agrarian Relations*, 114.

¹⁴⁶ Private.

¹⁴⁷ Self-cultivated.

¹⁴⁸ Rothermund, *Agrarian Relations*, 114-15.

¹⁴⁹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 215-16.

¹⁵⁰ Ray, C. R. *Das*, 198-205; Rothermund, *Agrarian Relations*, 110-11; Bakshi, *Swaraj*, 39.

¹⁵¹ Hauser, *Kisan Sabha*, 66.

¹⁵² Kaushal Kishore Sharma, *Agrarian Movements and Congress Politics in Bihar* (New Delhi, 1989), 68.

¹⁵³ Fair.

¹⁵⁴ Organisation.

government's tenancy legislation as a 'sword hanging over their [the peasantry's] head'.¹⁵⁵ Shri Krishna Singh (Sinha) (1887-1961), who was from a 'middle-ranking farmer-cum Zamindar Bhumihar family' in Gaya district,¹⁵⁶ and the leader of the Swaraj party in the BOLC since 1927,¹⁵⁷ was named BPKS secretary. Divisional secretaries were then appointed, and a working committee was established with representatives from all of Bihar's districts. Finally, a resolution was also moved which 'formulated the demands of the tenants with regard to the proposed Tenancy Bill ... [namely] absolute rights of transferability of Kashtkari¹⁵⁸ land', *inter alia*.¹⁵⁹

With that, Sahajanand, although not a parliamentarian himself, was now firmly established as a peasant leader in the Gandhian mould although one with an 'agrarian populist' commitment to achieving change constitutionally.

II: From Gandhism to 'Agrarian Populism'? Sahajanand's Vision of the Peasant, c.1929-40

This section focuses on how Sahajanand's ideology evolved from the foundation of the BPKS in 1929 to his imprisonment at Hazaribagh Central jail in April 1940 for opposing India's participation in WWII. It argues that Sahajanand rejected the Gandhian approach to *zamindar-kisan* relations to call for complete abolition of the *zamindari* system due to his experience of the Bihar Earthquake of 1934, which was the occasion, if not the root cause, of a profound disagreement with Gandhi regarding how to appropriately respond to the oppressive behaviour of Bihari *zamindars*, as he perceived it, during its aftermath although his doubts about the practicalities of Gandhian *satyagraha*, on other grounds too, were also of longer gestation and were important. Consequently, Sahajanand, under the influence of Bihar's socialist left, was led towards the more radical doctrine of *zamindari* abolition, which resulted in an 'agrarian populist' policy proposal for land reform.

¹⁵⁵ 'Copy of a Special Branch Officer's Report', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 1, 150.

¹⁵⁶ Ramchandra Prasad and A. K. Sinha, *Sri Krishna Sinha* (New Delhi, 1987), 8.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 21-2; cf. Punil Kumar Jha, *Activities of Dr. Sri Krishna Singh in Provincial Politics* (Patna, 2009), 78-85.

¹⁵⁸ 'Tenancy.

¹⁵⁹ 'Special Branch Officer's Report', 151.

Sahajanand's BPKS, which in 1929 simply defined a peasant as anyone who earned a living from agriculture,¹⁶⁰ did not take off immediately because its leadership decided to allow its members to participate in the forthcoming Gandhi-led salt *satyagraha* in January 1930. Thus, he broke the salt law in April 1930 in a village near Bihta. Accordingly, he was arrested and sentenced to six months imprisonment.¹⁶¹

While in prison, Sahajanand started to take a much more critical attitude towards Gandhism. Reflecting on his thinking c.1930, he says that after observing the behaviour of his fellow political prisoners:

I became sure that ... Gandhi's truth and non-violence would never become working principles ... Even for getting petty things like bread, butter, and eggs, all kinds of manipulations were rampant ... Everyone was the monarch of all that he could survey. They had already forgotten all the high principles propagated by Gandhiji as if no one had known him or heard about him!¹⁶²

Sahajanand's doubts went so deep that following his release from prison and return to Bihta in September 1930, he found himself unable to address political meetings. More seriously, his health had also suffered during his imprisonment, so he took a break from politics.¹⁶³

During his recovery, Sahajanand kept abreast of the political news, especially the negotiations which led to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 1931,¹⁶⁴ which, as noted in chapter 1, ended the salt *satyagraha* and permitted most political prisoners to be released. But although his health eventually improved, Sahajanand says that he 'remained engaged in the ashram and its related work' rather than nationalist campaigning.¹⁶⁵

Conditions for the renewal of the BPKS would soon become favourable, however, after the resumption of civil disobedience in 1932 following the failure of the Second Round Table conference to reach agreement on India's constitutional future in late 1931 despite Gandhi's

¹⁶⁰ Rakesh Gupta, *Bihar Peasantry and the Kisan Sabha* (New Delhi, 1982), 43n8.

¹⁶¹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 221-4.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁶⁴ Brown, *Disobedience*, 153-191; Guha, *Gandhi*, 395-418.

¹⁶⁵ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 238.

attendance.¹⁶⁶ Consequently, the British arrested most of the Congress leadership, including Gandhi, at the national and provincial level.

In this context, the Bihar government decided to sponsor a new party, the United Party, in collaboration with the *zamindars* of the province,¹⁶⁷ which was preparing new tenancy legislation. The parts most objectionable to Sahajanand, as in 1929, were the following aspects affecting *zirat/bakasht* lands:

1. The sale and purchase of lands ... without any let or hindrance ... provided that the (a) zemindars [*sic*] be given Rs. 8/-per hundred on account of the purchase money; (b) if any part of a holding be sold the zemindars shall have a right of objection regarding the portion sold; (c) zemindars shall have an objection regarding the inadequate price of land.
...
4. The zemindars shall have a right to create 1/10th out of their entire land in their villages or patties, as zerait from their bakasht lands ...¹⁶⁸

Seeking to secure legitimacy from the tenants, the United Party organised a 'Kisan Sabha' meeting, funded by the Bihar Landholders Association, to endorse their draft bill in Patna on 14 February 1933.¹⁶⁹ Learning of the meeting via the press, Sahajanand was persuaded to attend it by Dr. Yugal Kishore Singh,¹⁷⁰ a homeopathic doctor from the village of Sabalpur in the Makhdumpur sub-district of Gaya district and Bhumihar Brahmin who opposed his local *zamindars* and reached out to Sahajanand.¹⁷¹

Sahajanand, who was a free man at this time due to his decision not to participate in Congress' renewed civil disobedience campaigning in 1932,¹⁷² was therefore able to undertake the work of 'exposing the fake Kisan Sabha' of the United Party and re-establishing the 'real Kisan Sabha'. Thus, at the meeting of 14 February, which he described as 'nothing less than a joke' due to it hosting only a few token peasants, he successfully managed to stall the organisation from approving the legislation by arguing that more effort needed to be made to consult opinion from

¹⁶⁶ Brown, *Disobedience*, 242-62; Guha, *Gandhi*, 424ff.

¹⁶⁷ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 242.

¹⁶⁸ 'Kisan Sabha Meeting', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 1, 349.

¹⁶⁹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 244.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 245-6.

¹⁷¹ Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, 454n86.

¹⁷² Pradhan, *Struggle*, 240.

the original Kisan Sabha's leadership, and the peasantry itself, before it was introduced in the BOLC.¹⁷³

Sahajanand was, however, ultimately unable to prevent the introduction of the new tenancy bill into the BOLC despite overseeing the passage of a resolution at a joint meeting of the 'real' and 'fake' Kisan Sabhas on 29 February which denounced the tenancy legislation and urged the government to withdraw it.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the controversy over the new legislation was fundamental in reviving the BPKS which organised protests against it throughout 1933.¹⁷⁵

In 1934, moreover, Sahajanand maintained his opposition to the Bihar government's tenancy legislation, insisting the government 'come to terms and ... give some concessions to the tenants'.¹⁷⁶ He also demanded that the Bihar government:

[F]rame laws as were [*sic*] existed in the Panjab [*sic*] for the protection of poor tenants from the clutches of the money lenders, such as [the] ... Agriculturists Relief Act.¹⁷⁷

Indeed, Chhotu Ram's Unionist Party did ultimately pass significant debt relief legislation in that year (see chapter 1). Nevertheless, although the Bihar government's tenancy bill was held up for two years, it did eventually pass on 11 September 1934.¹⁷⁸ But Sahajanand's efforts had ensured that its stipulations regarding *zirat* lands were effectively removed.¹⁷⁹ His recollections are clearly accurate given the existence of a contemporary report which stated that, at a meeting of the BPKS' Kisan Council, the following resolution was passed:

This Council having considered a press report of the meeting of the Bihar Land Holders Association held recently at Darbhanga House, Patna, setting forth that the Bihar Tenancy Amendment Bill 1933 with the provisions touching Bakasht lands left out be proceeded with in the B & O Legislative Council, while placing on record its satisfaction that the Bakasht clauses of the ... Bill which threatened to very seriously affect the existing rights of the

¹⁷³ Ibid., 246-9.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 251-2.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 260-1.

¹⁷⁶ 'District Monghyr Kisan Conference', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 1, 388.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 387.

¹⁷⁸ BOLCD: *Official Report*, vol. 31, Issue 7, (1934), 515-586, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/saoa.crl.34648517.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A5718b8fa0e66d824fd077c906683a79d&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&initiator=search-results&acceptTC=1, (Accessed 11/09/25).

¹⁷⁹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 263.

Kisans have been abandoned by the Landholders Association including the sponsors of the Bill as the result of strong opposition.¹⁸⁰

But while the BPKS' revitalisation in organisational terms was stunning, it had also undergone an even more significant ideological transformation by this time. This was chiefly due to the impact of the 1934 Bihar earthquake which had caused massive destruction, killing around seven thousand people and devastating towns, farmland, and railways. In response, Congress and the Bihar government launched major relief efforts, with widespread volunteer support. Within two weeks, forty-five relief groups operated in one city alone, and Gandhi visited in March to aid the efforts.¹⁸¹

Also participating in the relief works, Sahajanand claims he witnessed several instances of *zamindars* taking advantage of the disaster to pay poor villagers even lower wages and also continue to demand rent and repossess property if they couldn't pay.¹⁸² In March 1934, Sahajanand says he met with Gandhi to discuss his concerns but the latter's response, which suggested that individual *kisans* bring their grievances before the Maharaja of Darbhanga as his manager was a Congressman, infuriated him because:

Gandhiji's observations ... made it clear to me that he was totally unaware of how zamindars really functioned. He had no idea how these zamindars used to suppress the peasants ... It became clear to me that he was unaware of the grass-roots [*sic*] reality.¹⁸³

This experience was enough to prompt Sahajanand into a total break with Gandhi. To Sahajanand, his politics had just been shown to be based on a lie. So, he 'lost ... [his] Gandhi *bhakti*,¹⁸⁴ which ... [he] had maintained for the last fourteen years.'¹⁸⁵

To fill the ideological black hole left by Gandhism, Sahajanand therefore moved towards the newly formed CSP allowing its members to join the BPKS.¹⁸⁶ The CSP had been formed in May 1934 by young Congressmen frustrated by Gandhi's decision to suspend civil disobedience in

¹⁸⁰ 'A Meeting of the Kisan Council was Held on 29.7.34', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 1, 398.

¹⁸¹ Brown, *Disobedience*, 359; Guha, *Gandhi*, 479-80; Eleonor Marcussen, *Acts of Aid* (Cambridge, 2022), 110.

¹⁸² Pradhan, *Struggle*, 267-8.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 269.

¹⁸⁴ Devotion.

¹⁸⁵ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 270,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 275-6.

favour of relief work and cooperation with the government after the Bihar earthquake and to endorse the return of the constitutionally minded Swaraj party thereafter.¹⁸⁷ The CSP programme, adopted in October 1934, therefore called for, *inter alia*, the abolition of all systems of landlordism without compensation, the cancellation of rural debt and the promotion of cooperative and collective farming by the state.¹⁸⁸

The strong influence of the CSP programme on Sahajanand can be seen in his statement at the BPKS' third conference in Hajipur¹⁸⁹ in November 1935 that 'the time was ripe to speak out openly against the *zamindari* system'. Thus, a resolution was passed which committed the BPKS to its abolition without compensation,¹⁹⁰ which was confirmed in the BPKS manifesto of 1936, a document which also called for, *inter alia*, 'peasants to be freed from debt' and the creation of a 'a system of land settlement ... according to which the peasants are the owners of the land',¹⁹¹ a view also supported by Ranga and Singh (see chapters 3-4). The manifesto did not, however, clearly endorse the promotion of cooperative and/or collective farming as had been promoted in the CSP's 1934 programme.

Nevertheless, Sahajanand's rationale for *zamindari* abolition without compensation can be found in a 1939 pamphlet. Introducing his case, Sahajanand observed that:

So long the *Kisan-Mazur raj* ... is not established in our country ... our troubles cannot come to an end ... But in the establishment of that rule [*sic*] Zamindari and capitalism stand as obstacles ... Therefore [*sic*] the immediate goal of the Kisan Sabha is to end these two, as soon as possible ... Zamindari owes its origin to tyranny and oppression, by strangling the laws or by throwing dust into their eyes [*sic*] ... [so,] no harm can be done to the Zamindars ...¹⁹²

Sahajanand's objections to the *zamindari* system were thus essentially anticolonial, socialistic and pro-*kisan*. On the specific matter of why the *zamindars* did not deserve to receive compensation

¹⁸⁷ Brown, *Disobedience*, 376-8; cf. Guha, *Gandhi*, 490-2.

¹⁸⁸ Rusch, 'Socialist Party', 506; Masani, 'Radical Nationalism', 81-2.

¹⁸⁹ In Bihar.

¹⁹⁰ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 282-3.

¹⁹¹ 'Bihar Praanteev Kisan Sabha ka Ghoshana-Patr aur Kisanon ke Maangen' [Manifesto of BPKS and Demands of Peasants] [1936] in Sharma, *Rachनावली*, vol. 6, 99.

¹⁹² 'Pamphlet Containing Swami Sahajanand's Thesis on the Abolition of Zamindari System without Compensation', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 4, 2360-1.

for the elimination of the system of tax-farming over which they presided, moreover, Sahajanand argued that:

Many are in favour of abolishing the Zamindari system but they hold the view that the Zamindars should receive compensation. But I do not understand this. Why should they receive any price? Did they in 1793 purchase the Zamindaris from the Kisans after paying any price? Will history bear witness to this?¹⁹³ With a single stroke of [*sic*] pen the whole of the land was taken away from the Kisans and made over to the Zamindars who, during the Moghul rule¹⁹⁴ served as Commission agent in realising the revenue ...¹⁹⁵

This represented a more radical ‘agrarian populist’ informed stance than Chhotu Ram’s 1930–34 approach (see chapter 1), which sought reform within the existing land revenue system rather than its complete abolition, on account of the more exploitative *zamindari* system in Bihar vis-à-vis the *mahalgwari* system in Punjab.

Another important consequence of Sahajanand’s rejection of Gandhism for ‘Congress socialism’, moreover, was that the BPKS definition of the peasant, although it did not change fundamentally from the 1929 definition of peasant equals living from agriculture, did specifically acknowledge the plight of the agricultural labourer:

A peasant is in fact a grhasth,¹⁹⁶ and the word grhasth includes those who cultivate and live on land ... [therefore] big landlords, proprietors, moneylenders, zamindars, and sub-landlords are not ... peasants. In practice, grhasths are those who cultivate the land themselves, whether they are small landowners, tenants, or landless individuals who lease or rent land and also work on it ... Therefore, the Kisan Sabha wants ... a complete organization of small landholders, peasants and [agricultural] labourers.¹⁹⁷

This definition was quite moderate among Indian leftists. This can be seen in AIKS debates, an organisation Sahajanand was the founding President of in 1936,¹⁹⁸ especially between its Socialist and Communist factions after the CPI had been approved to join Congress through the CSP from January 1936 as a result of Comintern¹⁹⁹ instructions that it should adopt a new ‘united

¹⁹³ Cf. Guha, *Property*, 11-19 and *passim*.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (New York, 1963), ch.8; S. Nurul Hasan, ‘Zamindars Under the Mughals’, [1969] in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Mughal State* (New Delhi, 1998), 284-298.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Sahajanand’s Thesis’, 2362.

¹⁹⁶ Householder.

¹⁹⁷ ‘*Ghoshana-Patr*’, 95.

¹⁹⁸ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 286.

¹⁹⁹ Communist International.

front' policy of collaborating with other parties to develop the struggle against British imperialism.²⁰⁰ The AIKS became divided between the views of Ram Manohar Lohia (1910-67) from the CSP, who argued it should represent the interests of all *kisans*, and CPI leaders like Puchalapalli Sundarayya (1913-85) who wanted poorer peasants to become the backbone of the organisation.²⁰¹

The 1936 BPKS definition of the peasantry was, therefore, more in keeping with the Lohia-CSP approach. Regardless, Sahajanand had clearly, by 1939, moved beyond Gandhism towards a more radical political creed. Indeed, as hinted at above, in that year he had stated that 'our Kisans [will] prepare the ground for the establishment of Kisan Mazdoor Raj',²⁰² a slogan with strong socialistic, if not Marxist-Leninist, overtones, which will be assessed further in section III.

However, we should not exaggerate the 'Congress socialist' influence on Sahajanand. After all, the leading CSP theoretician Narendra Deva (1889-1956) was very critical of what he called 'peasantism', as expressed in his 1939 presidential speech to the AIKS' annual session in Gaya which Sahajanand almost certainly would have heard as he was in attendance.²⁰³ By 'peasantism', Deva meant considering:

All questions from the narrow and sectional view point of the peasant class. Its tenets are derived from the ideal that our economic evolution ... will necessarily have to retain its specific peasant character. It believes in rural democracy, which means a democracy of peasant proprietors ... Its programme is not based on any theory ... It has the outlook of the middle peasant ... and is based on petty bourgeois economy ... it would mean a kind of narrow agrarianism ... [and] may also lead to acute antagonism between town and country.²⁰⁴

On account of Deva's hostility to 'peasantism', although it is unclear from AIKS records what Sahajanand thought of his speech as they simply state that, following it, he 'read out messages of sympathy' from Nehru and others,²⁰⁵ Sahajanand's ideology post-Gandhi, especially his views on

²⁰⁰ William F. Kuracina, *Politics and Left Unity* (London, 2018), 27-31.

²⁰¹ Amit Kumar Gupta, *The Agrarian Drama* (New Delhi, 1996), 31.

²⁰² N. G. Ranga and Sahajanand, *History of Kisan Movement* (Madras, 1939), 143.

²⁰³ 'All India Kisan Conference', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 4, 2217-8.

²⁰⁴ Narendra Deva, 'The Peasant in [sic] Indian Revolution', [1939] in idem, *Socialism and the National Revolution* (Bombay, 1946), 51.

²⁰⁵ 'All India Kisan Conference', 2218.

land reform, is perhaps better seen as reflecting a core policy proposal of Indian ‘agrarian populist’ ideology, i.e. land reform designed to populate the countryside with small peasants, groups which Ram had championed in Punjab (see chapter 1). Indeed, we should be open to alternative readings of Sahajanand’s ideology given his strong ‘agrarianism’ when compared to figures like Deva because, as we will see later, Sahajanand ultimately ended up breaking with the CSP to pursue his own independent path.

However, a problem with seeing Sahajanand as an ‘agrarian populist’ after 1934 is that the BPKS remained essentially an extra-parliamentary organisation and one that, on account of the grip of the right on the Bihari Congress and national party more broadly, began to wage increasingly militant struggles, such as the *bakasht* movement in Barahiya Tal,²⁰⁶ c.1936-39.²⁰⁷

Barahiya Tal had seen most of its land fall into the possession of its *zamindars* via legal action pursued on account of non-payment of rent where tenants’ occupancy rights were sold to pay their arrears of land revenue which had been entrenched by the Great Depression induced collapse in agricultural prices by roughly half, c.1930-33.²⁰⁸ Thus, according to a government report of 1939:

In almost all the villages in the Tal area the tenants ... gradually lost a good area of their land partly for default of rent and partly through the machination of unscrupulous landlords and Mahajans.²⁰⁹

Consequently, the erstwhile tenants appear to have become sharecroppers who were, allegedly, annually moved from their plots to circumvent the provisions of the BTA, alongside other ‘different kinds of manipulative tricks’, Sahajanand claims, ‘including force, fraud and deceit.’²¹⁰ *Zamindar* control, moreover, it was further alleged, was maintained by their, *inter alia*, refusing to issue receipts when taking a share of their crop, which might have been used by peasants to

²⁰⁶ Now in Munger division of Bihar.

²⁰⁷ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 327-332.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 328; cf. *Report on the Land Revenue Administration of the Province of Bihar* (Patna 1933), 1-24; Stephen Henningham, *Peasant Movements in Colonial India* (Canberra, 1982), 141-3; Rothermund, *Depression*, 81-9.

²⁰⁹ ‘Barahiya Tal’, in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 2, 1341. Mahajans are money lenders.

²¹⁰ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 328.

prove their occupancy rights to the land, extorting *abwabs*²¹¹ and *begar*²¹² from peasants and intimidating them through regular beatings by hired goons.²¹³

In response, Karyanand Sharma (1901-1965), a BPKS leader from a poor Bhumihar tenant family and a trusted Sahajanand ally, started working with the tenants of Barahiya Tal in June 1936, establishing an organisation which quickly covered 40 villages. Under BPKS direction, the tenants launched a *satyagraha* which involved the forced harvesting of the crops on the lands they had worked, which the landlords responded to by demanding the Bihar government send in the military police. The Munger unit of the BPKS, meanwhile, organised a meeting in Sheikhpura, near Barahiya Tal, in March 1937 which was attended by peasants from all over the division. Following the forced harvesting of crops there too, Sharma and his colleagues were arrested, imprisoned and had the Indian Penal Code thrown at them.²¹⁴ Five hundred peasants were also arrested.²¹⁵

However, the *zamindars* quickly realised that repression would not be enough to quell unrest among the tenants of Barahiya Tal, so they approached Bihari Congress leaders, including Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963) a rightist Congressman and early supporter of Gandhi,²¹⁶ to form an arbitration committee. The committee recognised that 350 *bighas*²¹⁷ of land had been under the continuous cultivation of the tenants and promised to give it to them. The resulting agreement also resulted in the withdrawal of cases against arrested tenants and their leaders.²¹⁸

But when Congress formed the Bihar government in July 1937,²¹⁹ under the premiership of Shri Krishna Sinha (1937-9),²²⁰ after its victory in the elections earlier that year enabled by the

²¹¹ Taxes.

²¹² Forced labour.

²¹³ Das, *Unrest*, 132.

²¹⁴ 'Cases Arising Out of Kisan Satyagraha in Barhaiya Tal', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 3, 1395ff.

²¹⁵ 'Barahiya Tal Tangle Dispute', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 2 1198; cf. Pradhan, *Struggle*, 319, 329-30; Das, *Unrest*, 103, 132-133.

²¹⁶ Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography* (Bombay, 1957), 81-100.

²¹⁷ A *bigha* is approximately one third of an acre.

²¹⁸ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 330-1; Das, *Unrest*, 133.

²¹⁹ Bihar was separated from Orissa to become its own province in 1936.

²²⁰ Prasad and Sinha, *Krishna Sinha*, 25-48; Jha, *Krishna Singh*, 150-99.

abolition of power sharing²²¹ in the provinces and the devolution of further ministerial powers to provincial ministers under the Government of India Act, 1935, after deciding to contest the elections and ultimately take office in 1937 following the end of the Civil Disobedience campaigns,²²² it failed to grant the *kisans* the rights to these 350 *bighas* of lands out of a combination of conservatism, inertia and *zamindar* pressure. The *zamindars* took Congress inaction as a sign that they were free to recruit more *lathbais*,²²³ through whom they stopped the tenants from working on affected lands in 1938. Also, when the district unit of the BPKS held a meeting at Lakhisarai in 1938, *zamindar lathbais* allegedly assaulted peasants planning to attend from Barahiya Tal. At that point, Sahajanand and the BPKS leadership poured in while Sharma raised a group of volunteers, wearing red shirts, as a show of force to challenge the *zamindar lathbais*. Terrified, the Congress government established another arbitration committee, which this time offered the *kisans* 1000 *bighas* of land. Sharma, on behalf of the BPKS, refused the offer, however, and encouraged the peasants to strive for more,²²⁴ with the agitations extending well into 1939 as an *Indian Nation* article of 15 May reported that:

A dozen of the mounted military police and about 16 lathi²²⁵ constables were despatched yesterday on receipt of ... news from the Barhya [*sic*] Tal area ... that a section of the Kishans [*sic*] there has threatened to loot away, [*sic*] the crops ... awaiting the Arbitration Committee's Award before distribution among rightful claimants.²²⁶

Sahajanand's sanction of such robust campaigning was extremely controversial within Congress. In February 1937, the Champaran Congress Committee prohibited him from working in their district and instructed local Congressmen not to participate in his meetings. The Saran and Munger Congress Committees, and ultimately the Bihar Congress Committee (BCC), also issued similar instructions under the influence of Prasad, Gandhi and Sinha. The BCC also attacked

²²¹ Dyarchy.

²²² R. J. Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity* (Oxford, 1974), 296-312; G. McDonald, 'Unity on Trial', in Low, *Congress*, 306; Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises* (New Delhi and Oxford, 1992), 15-64; Misra, *VCT*, 133-4ff, 199-201.

²²³ Armed retainers.

²²⁴ 'Barahiya Tal Tangle Dispute', 1198ff; cf. Pradhan, *Struggle*, 331-2; Das *Unrest*, 133-4; Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 109-21.

²²⁵ Stick.

²²⁶ 'Trouble in Barahiya Tal', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 2, 1388.

Sahajanand for inciting violence, which he responded to by resigning from it in January 1938.²²⁷

In so doing, Sahajanand insisted that the peasant had a right to self-defence with a *danda*²²⁸

(*lathi*):

About the so-called danda cult ... [It] was indicted in the resolution of the executive committee of the Bihar Congress. Rajendra Babu²²⁹ in a long statement ... said that I ... had been ... telling peasants that they should ... tell the zamindars, “How will you realize your rent from us? Long live the stick.”²³⁰ ... It is true that I had been telling peasants to use their lathi ... in self-defence ... Peasants were always scared of the henchmen of the zamindars who resorted to physical beatings using lathis and even shoes ...²³¹

Sahajanand’s attempt to establish a legal basis for his position via the Code of Criminal

Procedure notwithstanding, some Gandhians, not least the Mahatma’s secretary Mahadev Desai

(1892-1942), were worried that Sahajanand’s campaigns risked widespread violent disorder. As

Desai wrote:

[S]elf-defence is held to be legitimate by the Congress, but ... [it] has never advocated the organised armed resistance in the name of self-defence that the Swami has done.²³²

In response, Sahajanand insisted that:

I have not only opposed organised armed resistance ... [and] I advised the kisans to be prepared with [a] danda when no other defence was left open to them ... as a Congressman I naturally prefer peaceful methods and I only advise them to resort to others when no other means are available.²³³

However, when Sahajanand reflected about the controversy in his memoirs, his line changed.

Now, Sahajanand argued that *satyagraha* only applied to the struggle for independence from the

British and ‘non-violence’ should not be used to encourage a lack of ‘manliness’ in day-to-day

campaigning:

It is true that Gandhiji had repeatedly said that he would any day prefer violence to cowardice. I am happy that in June 1940, the Congress Working Committee made it clear that non-violence as a weapon of struggle was only for the struggle for independence ... We need

²²⁷ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 323-5.

²²⁸ A large stick in this context. However, this word can also refer to the ritual staff held by an ascetic. Cf. Pradhan, *Struggle*, 327.

²²⁹ Rajendra Prasad.

²³⁰ In Hindi, this reads: ‘*Kaise loge malguzari, lathi hamara zindabad?*’

²³¹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 326.

²³² Mahadev Desai, ‘Dangerous Special Pleading’, [1938] in Raghav Sharan Sharma (ed.), *India’s War of Independence Through Kisan Documents*, vol. 2 (New Delhi, 2014), 675.

²³³ Sahajanand, ‘This Dangerous Pleading’, [1938] in Sharma, *Kisan Documents*, vol. 2, 678.

to prepare for even armed struggle against Nazi powers, including Germany. That is also my danda cult.²³⁴

Sahajanand's argument reflects a broader reality that Gandhian non-violence had come under immense pressure both within India and internationally as events in Europe, namely the Nazi annexation of Austria and invasion of Czechoslovakia, paved the way for WWII, c.1938-9. After its outbreak in September 1939, the Viceroy of India Lord Linlithgow (1887-1952) declared India's involvement in the war without consulting Congress or any Indian leaders.²³⁵ In response, the Congress provincial governments collectively resigned in November 1939. From that moment on, Gandhi started sounding out the potential for another civil disobedience campaign, which he would launch only when convinced that Congressmen were completely committed to non-violence and that it would not 'embarrass' the British government.²³⁶

Divisions quickly emerged on the Indian left over how to respond to Gandhi's position. At the Congress sessions in Tripuri²³⁷ (1939) and Ramgarh²³⁸ (1940), the CSP ultimately backed Gandhi's leadership, believing that preserving nationalist unity was essential for an effective struggle against colonial rule. Indeed, although the CSP was theoretically committed to revolutionary socialism from its founding in 1934, it remained staunchly nationalist in orientation. After 1939, it positioned itself relatively closer to Gandhi than other Indian leftist forces, as we will shortly see, even as important ideological differences remained.²³⁹

By contrast to the CSP, Sahajanand spent July 1939 clashing with Gandhi following an AICC ban on using *satyagraha* without the approval of the local provincial Congress committee. On the AICC's action, which was partly aimed at the *bakasht* agitations, Sahajanand asserted that peasants would not 'succumb to this new threat to their rights.'²⁴⁰

²³⁴ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 327.

²³⁵ Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War* (London, 2015), ch. 1, paras 10-11.

²³⁶ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi* (New Haven and London, 1989), 325-7; Guha, *Gandhi*, 586.

²³⁷ Now in North-East India.

²³⁸ Now in Jharkhand.

²³⁹ Masani, 'Radical Nationalism', 302, 305; cf. Asim Kumar Chaudhuri, *Socialist Movement in India* (Calcutta, 1980), 48-168; Girja Shankar, *Socialist Trends in Indian National Movement* (Meerut, 1987), 158-85.

²⁴⁰ Quoted in Hauser, *Kisan Sabha*, 172n8.

Following the outbreak of the war itself, moreover, Sahajanand then came into conflict with the CSP when they failed to attend 'anti-imperialist conferences' organised by Indian leftist groups, including the CPI. Frustrated, Sahajanand cut off relations with the CSP on 7 November.²⁴¹ Sahajanand explained his opposition to another potential Gandhi-led *satyagraha* in the following terms:

[The] conditions [of non-violence] are simply impossible of fulfilment. Hence the *satyagrah* [*sic*] under the Gandhian leadership and therefore that of the Congress High Command is unthinkable, and unless entire [*sic*] India consists of only saints or rather Gandhis even a talk of struggle under the present leadership is futile ...²⁴²

Essentially, Sahajanand was making similar objections to Chhotu Ram regarding Gandhian *satyagraha*, c.1920, in the sense of its unrealistic expectations of individuals (see chapter 1) albeit to rather different, non-loyalist conclusions as the former thought that the Gandhian Congress leadership was essentially holding back another civil disobedience campaign out of fear that it would lead to a violent uprising:

[T]he masses are ... awakened, restive, desperate, resentful and apt to catch hold of the fight no sooner than it is launched ... our Gandhian leaders will be the last people to invite this risk with their eyes wide open. But it is bound to occur if and when they take any serious forward step and this is the real key to their over emphasis on curious non-violence, rigid discipline and perilous caution.²⁴³

This was therefore a profoundly unparliamentary line to take and it contrasts strongly with Ram's behaviour at this time, a figure who continued to participate in the Punjab government and broadly support the British war effort after 1939.²⁴⁴ Nevertheless, as will be made clear in section III, Sahajanand did ultimately accept parliamentary and democratic methods for championing the interests of the peasantry in favour of violent revolution.

After abandoning the CSP, Sahajanand decided to work with the influential leftist leader Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945). Bose had shown inclinations towards socialism since the 1920s although his ideology became clearer in the 1930s.²⁴⁵ Sahajanand first met him in March

²⁴¹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 353-4.

²⁴² Quoted in Hauser, *Kisan Sabha*, 173-4.

²⁴³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 175.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Chowdhry, *Politics*, 185-97.

²⁴⁵ Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), ch. 3.

1939 at the Tripuri Congress.²⁴⁶ Not long after the session, Bose had been unceremoniously forced to resign as Congress president following determined opposition to his radical rejection of Gandhian non-violence, enthusiasm for peasant and worker radicalism and apparent partiality to European fascism from Gandhi and the Congress right, especially Vallabhbhai Patel.²⁴⁷ This revealed that Congress remained within their grip and they were far too pro-*zamindar* for Sahajanand's liking especially as the party remained uncommitted to abolish the *zamindari* system at this time, as discussed further in chapter 4, which makes Sahajanand's strong extra-parliamentary turn in during the *bakasht* struggles, c.1936-9, as explored earlier, more comprehensible on account of its situational nature plus Bihari political-economic context in this era.

Sahajanand was therefore strongly sympathetic to Bose's cause, particularly given the support the latter had extended publicly to the AIKS at the Haripura Congress of 1938 in the face of attacks from Patel.²⁴⁸ Patel had also questioned whether the AIKS had the right to exist in response to critical remarks made by Sahajanand regarding the 'fetish of non-violence' being encouraged by Gandhians at the AIKS' Comilla²⁴⁹ session of March 1938.²⁵⁰ Indeed, perhaps Sahajanand's most radical statement hitherto on Gandhian 'non-violence' was also made that year when he declared that:

If a hungry person gets rice ..., he will not care whether he got it through truth and non-violence or in some other way.²⁵¹

However, as is clear from Sahajanand's Presidential Address to the Singhbhum²⁵² District Kisan Conference in July 1939, Sahajanand also argued that 'our methods must strictly be peaceful' because, while he was 'no believer in the Gandhian type of Ahimsa',²⁵³ he was:

²⁴⁶ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 349.

²⁴⁷ S. C. Bose, *The Indian Struggle* [1943?] (Oxford, 1997), 361-78; cf. Reba Som, *Differences Within Consensus* (London, 1995), 240-63.

²⁴⁸ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 342.

²⁴⁹ Now in Bangladesh.

²⁵⁰ Quoted in Hauser, *Kisan Sabha*, 158.

²⁵¹ Sahajanand, 'Rajniti aur Gandhivad' ['Politics and Gandhism'] [1938] in Sharma, *Rachनावलि*, vol. 2, 562.

²⁵² Then South Bihar, now Jharkhand.

²⁵³ Non-violence.

[C]onvinced ... that the violence on the part of the oppressed serves ... only the oppressors and it is simply in their interest that the masses resort to violence ... [as] it will be easy for them to crush and annihilate the masses, mercilessly by applying weapons of suppression and repression.²⁵⁴

Thus, in this context, it is unsurprising that Sahajanand eventually stated that Patel was ‘perhaps the greatest enemy of the Kisan Sabha.’²⁵⁵

Furthermore, Sahajanand’s sympathy for Bose can also be seen in his statement that the latter’s forced resignation as Congress president was a product of the ‘dirtiest politics’ he had ever seen.²⁵⁶ So, in a letter to P. C. Joshi (1907-1980), the General Secretary of the CPI (1936-47), Sahajanand declared he would support Bose, who at Tripuri had called for mass civil disobedience if the British government did not reply to a formal ultimatum demanding immediate Indian independence, and his Forward Bloc Party, which had been founded in June 1939.²⁵⁷ Therefore, he assisted Bose with the organisation of an ‘anti-compromise conference’ in March 1940.

By this point, the dominant position within the Congress Working Committee, led by Patel in opposition to Gandhi’s line, was that active cooperation with the British war effort might be fruitful considering the progress of Adolf Hitler (1889-1945)’s *blitzkrieg* campaigns in Denmark and Norway. The rationale was that Indian support of the precarious British position had the potential to lead to a new political deal to advance the nationalist struggle.²⁵⁸

According to a contemporary report on the conference, Sahajanand, however, led a ‘big procession ... accompanied by band [*sic*] about 100 red shirt volunteers ... from the meeting place’, some of whom were almost certainly Communists, which ‘returned at about 10.30 A.M. and [was] followed by a big meeting’.²⁵⁹ In his subsequent address, Sahajanand asserted that ‘we

²⁵⁴ ‘The Singhbhum District Kisan Conference ... Presidential Address by ... Sahajanand Saraswati’, in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 4, 2305-6.

²⁵⁵ Walter Hauser (ed.), *Sahajanand on Agricultural Labour and the Rural Poor* [1941] (New Delhi, 2005), 3-4.

²⁵⁶ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 348.

²⁵⁷ Hauser, *Kisan Sabha*, 177-8; Bose, *Opponent*, 158.

²⁵⁸ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 351.

²⁵⁹ ‘Kisan Meeting held at Ramgarh’, in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 5, 2934.

will have to be ready to take the risk of launching direct action on our own ... [because] only then will we be able to save the nation from surrender.²⁶⁰

Thereafter, Sahajanand vigorously spoke out against Congress extending any 'support to the British in the European War and vowed to oppose it until the end'.²⁶¹ At the AIKS meeting at Palasa,²⁶² the 'anti-compromise' policy was confirmed via a resolution which Sahajanand presided over in his role as AIKS General Secretary.²⁶³ But inevitably, he was arrested on 29 April and sentenced to three years in prison.²⁶⁴

III: 'Revolution and United Front'? Sahajanand's Exploration of Marxism and his Political Practice, c.1940-50

This section examines Sahajanand's exploration of Marxist-Leninist political theory during his imprisonment at Hazaribagh Central Jail, c.1940-42 and his praxis to 1950. The section argues that Sahajanand suddenly developed a serious interest in Marxist-Leninism on account of him interacting with Indian Communists while in prison. However, it also argues that Sahajanand's overall ideology, while containing some Marxist-Leninist aspects, is perhaps better understood as a form of 'agrarian populism' because it was in this period that he clearly came to advocate land reform, cooperatives and parliamentary democracy, in a sense compatible with the general Indian 'agrarian populist' ideological tradition, via his own AIUKS party, c.1948-50.

During his imprisonment at Hazaribagh Central Jail, Sahajanand wrote seven books and started an eighth.²⁶⁵ These works include his autobiography,²⁶⁶ a booklet about the peasant 'fights' led by the BPKS,²⁶⁷ a further set of personal recollections about the BPKS,²⁶⁸ a pamphlet on the agricultural labourer,²⁶⁹ a book about the peasants of Jharkhand,²⁷⁰ a commentary on a key

²⁶⁰ Sahajanand, 'Akhil Bharatiya Samajanta Virodhi Sammelan' ['All India Anti-Compromise Conference] [1940] in Sharma, *Rachmanali*, vol. 6, 238.

²⁶¹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 352.

²⁶² Now in Andhra Pradesh.

²⁶³ Hauser, *Kisan Sabha*, 178-9.

²⁶⁴ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 352; Bose, *Struggle*, 383.

²⁶⁵ Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, 672n2.

²⁶⁶ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 356-7.

²⁶⁷ Sahajanand, *Kisan Kaise Ladte Hain?* [*How Should the Peasant Fight?*] [1941] (New Delhi, 1989), preface.

²⁶⁸ Sahajanand, *Kisan Sabha ke Sansmaran*.

²⁶⁹ Hauser, *Agricultural Labour*.

²⁷⁰ Walter Hauser (ed.), *Swami Sahajanand and the Peasants of Jharkhand* (New Delhi, 2005).

Hindu religious text,²⁷¹ and another booklet on the meanings of ‘revolution’ for the peasantry.²⁷²

The first to be published, however, was *Kranti aur Sanyukt Morcha* (1943),²⁷³ which reflects its importance.²⁷⁴

A formidable introduction to Marxist-Leninist political theory, *Kranti aur Sanyukt Morcha* begins with a quote from Karl Marx (1818-1883) that ‘the economic structure of society is the real foundation on which ... politics ... [is] stood on [and] the mode of production ... determines the nature of social, political and economic life in general’.²⁷⁵ This Marxist materialist vision of politics set the tone for the overall book in which Sahajanand asked, ‘how can those peasants or workers have their own [self] rule?’²⁷⁶ In so doing, he defined the proletariat (*sarvabara*) as:

[L]abourers who work in factories, railways or in coal mines ... who do not have any other property except their body of labour power or women and children ... their own house or hut ... land ... tools or weapons ... [or] any capital If they earn, they eat ... they do not know how long their job will last and it can be snatched away ...²⁷⁷

Quoting Lenin’s ‘Lecture on the 1905 Revolution’ (1917),²⁷⁸ which reflected on the Russian Revolution of 1905,²⁷⁹ and was written a matter of months before the October Revolution of 1917,²⁸⁰ Sahajanand argued that the proletariat should lead the revolutionary struggle because they had the power of the strike at their disposal which, as had been shown, during the 1905 Revolution in Russia, effectively brought other classes into the revolutionary struggle.²⁸¹

Furthermore, Sahajanand also followed Lenin’s explanation for the ultimate failure of the 1905 revolution through the example of a group of Black Sea soldiers in revolt on the *Prince*

²⁷¹ Sahajanand, ‘*Gita Hridaya*’ [*The Heart of the Gita*] [1948] in Sharma, *Rachnawali*, vol. 3, 7-690; cf. Arun Kumar, *Rewriting the Language of Politics* (New Delhi, 2001), 110-61.

²⁷² Sahajanand, *Kisan Kya Karen?* [*What Should the Peasant Do?*] [1952] (New Delhi, 1989), preface.

²⁷³ Sahajanand, ‘*Kranti aur Sanyukt Morcha*’ [*Revolution and United Front*] [1943] in Sharma, *Rachnawali*, vol. 5, 5-235.

²⁷⁴ Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, 573n4, 648n181.

²⁷⁵ Sahajanand, ‘*Kranti?*’, epigraph.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁷⁸ V. I. Lenin, ‘Lecture on the 1905 Revolution’, [1917] in *idem*, *CW*, vol. 23, 236-253.

²⁷⁹ Neil Harding, *Leninism* (Basingstoke, 1996), 307.

²⁸⁰ Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy* (London, 1997), 173-212, 474-551.

²⁸¹ Sahajanand ‘*Kranti?*’, 73-6.

Potemkin ship who released a group of arrested officers, following promises of concessions, only for the latter to organise their suppression after their release:²⁸²

The broad masses ... were still too naïve, their mood was too passive, too good-natured, too Christian ... What they lacked was ... a clear understanding that only ... a victory over all the military and civil authorities, only the overthrow of the government and the seizure of power throughout the country could guarantee the success of the revolution.²⁸³

This led Sahajanand towards his most radical rejection of Gandhian non-violence yet when he argued that ‘non-violence, giving in and non-cooperation do not suffice ... [and] it is necessary to suppress the enemies of the proletariat ruthlessly and shamelessly’.²⁸⁴ Regarding the allies of the proletariat, meanwhile, Sahajanand, like Lenin, ascribed the peasants a revolutionary role when he asserted that if the peasants ‘become friends and companions of the proletariat, then victory will certainly be easy’.²⁸⁵

Lenin also thought that it’s necessary for the success of the revolution to take the peasants along with it and that this was possible only when they were firmly determined to get land. That’s why he clearly said that we have to first eliminate monarchy and landlordism ...²⁸⁶

Drawing on Lenin’s ‘Draft Programme of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party’ (1902), a document which calls for the breaking-up of large, landed estates,²⁸⁷ Sahajanand elaborated further that:

[T]he easiest way to make every corner of the country ... the centre of revolution is to give ... the peasants ... full help in ... [their] work to get rid of the landlords and grab the land themselves and to share it.²⁸⁸

Following this, Sahajanand later stated his belief that without support from the peasantry, it would not be possible to introduce communism into the Indian village. Thus, ‘co-operative farming is necessary [but] only after this can the peasants start collective farming’,²⁸⁹ a view he

²⁸² Ibid., 141.

²⁸³ Lenin, ‘Lecture’, 245.

²⁸⁴ Sahajanand, ‘*Kranti?*’, 141.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 115.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 116.

²⁸⁷ V. I. Lenin, ‘Draft for the Preparation of the Programme of the R. S. D. L. P’, [1902] in idem, *CW*, vol. 6, 28.

²⁸⁸ Sahajanand, ‘*Kranti?*’, 117.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 150-1.

supported by citing an essay by Joseph Stalin (1878-1953),²⁹⁰ the latter having adopted collectivisation as his signature agrarian policy, c.1928-40.²⁹¹

However, as is clear above, Sahajanand was not calling for the immediate collectivisation of Indian agriculture, which was practically not then possible given that the CPI, or any Indian party, lacked full political power in the country. And even if it did, the CPI, in April 1940, acknowledged a recent ‘neglect’ in its work among the *kisans* which led it to pursue the more modest goals of organising peasants to protest against rising prices, increasing their awareness of proletarian strikes, recruiting more party workers from *kisan* backgrounds, increasing the party’s presence in villages and making its political slogans better known among them.²⁹²

Sahajanand’s sudden interest in Marxist-Leninism was most likely the result of him, while in prison, coming into ‘close contact with ... young Communists’.²⁹³ While Hauser did not support this with clear primary evidence, it is plausible that this happened given that the CPI, like Sahajanand, as touched upon in section II, initially opposed the war which led to the mass arrest of Communist leaders across India in March 1940, including the polyglot intellectual and founding member of the Bihar CPI (f. 1939) Rahul Sankrityayan (1893-1963),²⁹⁴ who had recently presided over the BPKS’ ‘Seventh Provincial Kisan Conference’ in February 1940.²⁹⁵ But a qualification is that Sahajanand had clearly read some Communist literature before his imprisonment as the pamphlet containing his Presidential Address to the Singhbhum District Kisan Conference in July 1939, cited in section II, is prefaced with a quote from Lenin’s ‘Speech in Favour of the Resolution on the War’ (1917).²⁹⁶

²⁹⁰ J. V. Stalin, ‘The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists’, [1924] in idem, *Problems of Leninism* (Moscow, 1945), 94-123.

²⁹¹ Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin*, vol. 2 (London, 2017), xii, 9-15 and *passim*.

²⁹² ‘War and Our Tasks’, [1940] in Jyoti Basu (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement in India*, vol. IV (Calcutta, 1997), 197.

²⁹³ Hauser, *Kisan Sabha*, 181.

²⁹⁴ Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 183; Das, *Unrest*, 169.

²⁹⁵ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 320; cf. Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, 601n92.

²⁹⁶ ‘The Singhbhum District Kisan Conference’, 2294; cf. Lenin, *CW*, vol. 24, 257-69.

Sahajanand's interest in Marxist-Leninism was therefore directly linked to the developing international situation. Thus, his specific interest in revolution should be contextualised through contemporary events. Almost immediately after the onset of WWII, the CPI called for wartime conditions to form the foundation of a Leninist revolution. In March 1940, the CPI, in a document titled 'Proletarian Path', argued for a general strike in Indian industry alongside nationwide no-rent and no-tax campaigns followed by a CPI-led armed capture of the state's military and police institutions in the cities plus the countryside and ultimately a war with remaining government forces. Although the document was intended to popularise the CPI's ultimate policy in the short term rather than provide a direct call to arms.²⁹⁷

The immediate result of Sahajanand's conversion to a Leninist vision of revolution was that his estrangement with the CSP, who had recently expelled CPI members for spreading malicious propaganda about their attitudes towards civil disobedience,²⁹⁸ was complete. Thus, when Narayan from the CSP, who had chaired a BPKS 'Provincial Kisan Conferences' in 1935,²⁹⁹ 'wanted to raise a new party christened as People's Party (Janata Party)', Sahajanand refused to join it.³⁰⁰

While Sahajanand does not name specific Communists who influenced him during his imprisonment in his autobiography,³⁰¹ Gupta claims that his BPKS comrade Karyanand Sharma, who became a member of the CPI in 1942,³⁰² joined Sahajanand at the Hazaribagh jail in September 1940.³⁰³ According to Hauser, Sharma's influence was particularly important for 'gauging Sahajanand's systematic turn to the militant left.'³⁰⁴

²⁹⁷ Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 177, 179-82.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 182.

²⁹⁹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 317.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 357.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 357ff.

³⁰² Gupta, *Kisan Sabha*, 126-7.

³⁰³ Ibid., 119.

³⁰⁴ Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, 645n181.

What can be said for certain, in this context, however, is that, after Sahajanand's early release from prison on 8 March 1942,³⁰⁵ he was granted permission by the colonial authorities to interview thirteen prisoners who remained in Hazaribagh Central Jail on 11 July, among whom there was at least one Communist i.e. his BPKS comrade Sankrityayan.³⁰⁶ But it is not clear what the purpose of the interviews were. Thus, while there is considerable evidence pointing to a serious interest of Sahajanand in Marxist-Leninism, it is nevertheless important not to overstate his ideological affinity for it at this time as he did not join the CPI, c.1940-2, instead remaining in Congress.³⁰⁷

Nevertheless, Sahajanand adopted the same view as the Communists on matters of foreign policy during his imprisonment. This can be seen in his decision to abandon the 'anti-compromise' cause when he completely changed his position on WWII to offer support to the CPI's 'People's War' slogan, which called on Indians to support the British war effort in response to the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in June 1941.³⁰⁸ As Sahajanand recalls, he believed Hitler simply had to be defeated.³⁰⁹ In so doing, he even made the counterfactual claim that the same action would have been necessary during WWI in Russia, through citing an unnamed work by the British Labour and sometime Communist politician John Strachey (1901-1963),³¹⁰ that Lenin would have opted not to struggle against the Tsarist war effort had the more powerful capabilities of Hitler's fascist regime, relative to Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859-1941)'s regime during WWI, have applied in his time.³¹¹

Consequently, Sahajanand says that, when Indulal Yagnik (1892-1972), an AIKS leader from Gujarat,³¹² wrote to him at the end of 1941 to express similar sentiments, a draft resolution was

³⁰⁵ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 355.

³⁰⁶ 'Memo No.62-C', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 5, 3195.

³⁰⁷ Das, *Unrest*, 104, 169.

³⁰⁸ Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 191ff.

³⁰⁹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 364.

³¹⁰ Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, 683-4n16.

³¹¹ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 363-6.

³¹² Ajay Skaria, 'Homeless in Gujarat and India', *IESHR*, 38, 3 (2001), 272.

prepared to express them.³¹³ The key part of the resolution, which was passed by the AIKS'

Central Kisan Council (CKC) in Nagpur on 13 February 1942,³¹⁴ were the following lines:

[T]his council has no hesitation in urging India's peasants to stand ... with the forces of Russia ... [and] other progressive powers, and to thus wage a ruthless struggle for the final defeat of fascism. For if Nazi Germany and its allies were to win, all hopes for the freedom, economic ... progress, and safety of India's peasants and common people would be crushed ... and great destruction would descend upon them.³¹⁵

Sahajanand clearly took the new policy seriously given that, at the ninth conference of the BPKS after his release from prison in March 1942, he defended it in the face of severe criticism when he suggested that propaganda promoting it should be distributed among the *kisans*.³¹⁶ But most importantly, Sahajanand decided not to participate in Congress' 'Quit India' campaigns, launched in August 1942, on account of it.

Gandhi's campaign, which called for an immediate withdrawal of the British from India, pursued after the failure of a mission led by the Labour war cabinet minister Stafford Cripps (1889-1952) to broker Congress support for the war effort in March 1942, and appears, although it is unclear as Gandhi made various statements in the run-up to the campaign that appear to show a willingness to deploy violent tactics,³¹⁷ to have been motivated by a desire to secure India's freedom non-violently, and thus make a success of his life's work, on account of his advancing age.³¹⁸

On 8 August, the AICC therefore passed a resolution calling on the British to leave India immediately and to commence a 'mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale' led by Gandhi who then called on Indians 'to do or die'. The British authorities responded by immediately arresting most Congress leaders and provincial governments were given sweeping Ordinance powers to suppress protests.³¹⁹ This was prudent from the Raj's point of view as, over

³¹³ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 366.

³¹⁴ Sahajanand, *Presidential Address* (Gaya, 1942), 7.

³¹⁵ Sahajanand, '*Jang aur Rashtriya Lada'* [*The War and the National Fight*] [1942] in Sharma, *Rachनावलि*, vol. 6, 113.

³¹⁶ Gupta, *Kisan Sabha*, 121.

³¹⁷ Francis G. Hutchins, *India's Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 197-216; Devji, *Impossible Indian*, 151-61; Maria Misra, 'Sergeant-Major Gandhi', *JAS*, 73, 3 (2014), 690-1, 695.

³¹⁸ Brown, *Gandhi*, 334-8.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 338-9; Hutchins, *Revolution*, 217-23; Guha, *Gandhi*, 673-4.

the following months, the largest rebellion in India broke out since 1857, which involved, *inter alia*, strikes in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi, extensive peasant rebellions in eastern UP and Bihar and a clandestine terrorist movement, the latter of which continued until 1944.³²⁰

In an unpublished report of September 1942, Sahajanand, however, denounced the 'Quit India' movement as a 'total failure' because:

All the Congress organisations ... were declared illegal and hundreds including all the big leaders were instantaneously removed from the scene, leaving the people and the remaining Congress workers totally [*sic*] be-wildered.³²¹

His opposition to the 'Quit India' movement also led him to attempt to persuade the peasants of eastern UP and Bihar who were taking part in the nationalist, revolutionary upsurge there to lay down their arms, severely damaging his nationalist credentials in the process.³²² The AIKS then split on account of Sahajanand's/the CPI's 'People's War' policy. Thus, the CSP and Forward Bloc, who both left the organisation in late-1941, were quickly followed by the exit of Ranga, the movement's founding General Secretary, all of whom left essentially on nationalistic grounds, in 1942.³²³

Furthermore, Sahajanand's endorsement of the 'People's War' slogan also had unintended consequences which led to his own departure from the AIKS. The issue that caused this was the CPI's decision in September 1942, probably in a bid to drum up support for the British war effort and allow the party to find support among Indian Muslims, to approve a new 'nationality policy' which effectively endorsed the Pakistan demand of the Muslim League,³²⁴ which had only just emerged in a clear sense in 1940 when the League passed a resolution calling for the creation

³²⁰ Gyanendra Pandey, 'Introduction', in idem (ed.), *The Indian Nation in 1942* (Calcutta, 1988), 1-2; Misra, *VCT*, 220.

³²¹ Sahajanand, 'Present Political Situation', (1942), Sahajanand Papers, PMML, Instalment I, Microfilm, Roll 1, 2-4.

³²² Harcourt, 'Revolution', 336-40; Stephen Henningham, 'Quit India in Bihar and the Eastern United Provinces', in Guha, *JSS II*, 148; Chandra Mitra, 'Popular Uprising in 1942', in Pandey, *Nation*, 181.

³²³ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 368; N. G. Ranga, *Kisans and Communists* (Bombay, 1949), 21-2; Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 207.

³²⁴ Sunanda Sanyal and Soumya Basu, *The Sickie and the Crescent* (Kolkata and London, 2011), 30-51.

of 'independent Muslim states'.³²⁵ The AIKS, however, had at its Bihta session of May 1942 agreed to remain neutral on the issue.³²⁶

In February 1945, however, Sahajanand, AIKS President, suspended key officials and units for allegedly violating the Bihta agreement by promoting Muslim self-determination, prompting the CKC to declare his actions 'unconstitutional' on 8 March 1945. At this point, Sahajanand resigned as AIKS President declaring that the Communists, who were now in a majority in all the provincial units of the organisation apart from in Bihar, were trying to make the AIKS 'anti-Congress' and were using the organisation primarily to promote their Pakistan policy.³²⁷

Consequently, a resolution was passed at the following AIKS session at Netrokona³²⁸ in April which formally allowed the BPKS to secede from the organisation,³²⁹ which means that Sahajanand, like Ram (see introduction), clearly found himself unable to support, or at least fully support, the 'Pakistan demand' of the Muslim League. Also, like Ram, Sahajanand generally defined 'Indianness' through peasant identity, promoted Hindu-Muslim unity from an early stage and carefully organised his 1930s *kisan* rallies to minimise communal tension.³³⁰

Following the secession of the BPKS from the AIKS, Sahajanand attempted to build bridges with Congress when he stated at the twelfth BPKS Conference in 1945 that 'the Indian National Congress symbolises that fight for independence ... [and] it is our foremost duty to strengthen it'.³³¹ However, according to N. G. Ranga, Sahajanand's attempts to do so were thwarted by the 'resentful and petulant attitude' of Bihari Congressmen and thus he was unable to persuade Gandhi or Prasad to work with him.³³² Sahajanand was thus a politically isolated figure.³³³

³²⁵ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman* (Cambridge, 1985), 7, 50-60; Devji, *Pakistan*, 24-48.

³²⁶ Gupta, *Kisan Sabha*, 122.

³²⁷ 'The Kisan Sabha and Swami Sahajanand', in Sharma, *Kisan Documents*, 633-5.

³²⁸ Now in Bangladesh.

³²⁹ Gupta, *Kisan Sabha*, 123.

³³⁰ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 129, 343.

³³¹ Quoted in Gupta, *Kisan Sabha*, 124.

³³² *Ibid.*, 124n163.

³³³ Pradhan, *Struggle*, 360.

When Indian independence arrived in August 1947, after the government of Labour's Clement Attlee (1883-1967) decided after taking power in 1945 that Britain essentially could no longer afford to maintain the Raj on account of the colossal cost of WWII, and consequently executed a 'transfer of power' to Congress and the Muslim League,³³⁴ Sahajanand therefore made a public appeal for left unity. In his *Ab Kya Ho?* (1947) pamphlet, published in August 1947, Sahajanand called for the dissolution of Congress and its replacement by a 'united front ... of all the parties which are ready to establish a classless society in a Marxist manner', a document highlighting the conflicting class interests of peasants and workers against Congress leaders, including landlords and other wealthy, even 'bourgeois', groups.³³⁵

Sahajanand's line was much more radical than the CPI's, which was following a 'constitutional communism' strategy based on loyal opposition to the new Indian government, intended to take advantage of the CPI's hard-won status as a legal party on account of its support for the British war effort. During the 1946 Indian elections, moreover, its agrarian policy was very moderate as it backed the 'abolition of landlordism' all the while assuring voters that it would 'not touch the small zamindar ... or the rich peasant.'³³⁶

Thus, the CPI declared on the eve of independence that it would 'join the day of national rejoicing' and in October pledged its support to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru, who himself had socialist leanings, had engaged with peasant movements, especially in UP, since the 1920s.³³⁷ In the 1930s, he had even personally corresponded with Sahajanand regarding Congress agrarian policy.³³⁸ So, it is understandable that 'constitutional communists' like Joshi chose to call for a 'joint front from Pandit Nehru to the Socialists and the Communists.'³³⁹

³³⁴ R. J. Moore, *Escape from Empire* (Oxford, 1983), vii-viii.

³³⁵ Sahajanand, '*Ab Kya Ho?* [*What Happens Now?*] [1947] in Sharma, *Rachनावली*, vol. 2, 538-41, 550.

³³⁶ Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 223-251. Quote at 230.

³³⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* [1936] (New Delhi, 1982), 51-74, 182-89, 236-44.

³³⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru to Sahajanand, 1 April 1936, Sahajanand Papers, PMML, Instalment I, Microfilm, Roll 1.

³³⁹ Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 263-4.

Within six months of independence, however, the CPI executed an astonishing U-turn.³⁴⁰ At a meeting of the CPI's Central Committee at Bombay in December 1947, B. T. Ranadive (1904-1990), a longstanding CPI member with a solid background in the Bombay trade union movement,³⁴¹ and his radical supporters, attacked the assumptions underpinning Joshi's 'constitutional communism' approach which assumed that Congress could be influenced by peasant and worker opinion and/or re-organised to include leftist political workers and passed a resolution calling for 'uncompromising struggle against the government'.³⁴² Ranadive and his followers swayed the CPI largely due to the success of the Telangana Uprisings (1946-1952), despite a mix of domestic and international influences,³⁴³ which was challenging the sovereignty of the Nizam of Hyderabad and suggested to them that the time was ripe for a wider revolution.³⁴⁴

In the long run, however, Andhra CPI leaders used the Telangana uprisings and Maoist ideas to challenge Ranadive's leadership, especially the concept of 'new democracy',³⁴⁵ which was developed by Mao in an essay which ironically tones down the unique role played by the peasantry in the revolutionary Chinese struggle in orthodox Marxist-Leninist fashion,³⁴⁶ in their 'Andhra Letter' of June 1948. This document proposed a rewriting of the party's revolutionary strategy follow Maoist tactics, i.e. an extended civil conflict driven by a peasant-led uprising, ultimately leading to the CPI taking control of the government.³⁴⁷ But, in the short term, such a radical change of policy meant that Ranadive had effectively replaced Joshi as leader of the party with a mandate to lead the party into a violent revolutionary struggle.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁰ Shalini Sharma, "Yeh Azaadi Jhooti Hai!", *MAS*, 48, 5 (2014), 1358-9.

³⁴¹ Ammar Ali Jan, 'A Study in the Formation of Communist Thought in India', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2018), 127-8.

³⁴² Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 269.

³⁴³ Puccalapalli Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle and its Lessons* (Calcutta, 1972), 19ff.

³⁴⁴ Stree Shakti Sanghatana, 'We Were Making History' (New Delhi, 1989), 33ff; Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Communism in India* (New York, 2014), 123-148; Sunil Purushotham, *From Raj to Republic* (Stanford, 2021); 182-224.

³⁴⁵ Mao Zedong, 'On New Democracy', [1940] in idem, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 2 (Peking, 1965), 339-384.

³⁴⁶ Stuart R. Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung* (London, 1988), 76-84

³⁴⁷ Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 287.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 265-78; cf. B. T. Ranadive, *Nehru Govt Declares War Against Toilers* (Bombay, 1948), 1-22.

Sahajanand, meanwhile, was becoming increasingly exasperated with Congress' slow progress in bringing about *zamindari* abolition in Bihar after it had convincingly won the Bihar elections of 1946,³⁴⁹ and passed a resolution promising to implement it in the Bihar Legislative Assembly in September due to rising popular pressure from the challenging wartime economic situation, including the devastating 1943 Bengal famine - Bengal being the home of the *zamindari* system,³⁵⁰ which made the pressure of landlord demands intolerable in rural areas,³⁵¹ although we will discuss further factors that prompted the Congress to endorse *zamindari* abolition at this time in chapter 4.

In this context, Sahajanand described the Bihar government's bill as 'vague' because 'the object as stated therein is to remove all intermediaries between the Government and the raiyats' with the latter term defined in such a way as to not exclude people 'who are in possession of hundreds of acres of lands'.³⁵² Indeed, Congress could only afford to go after the very largest landlords, like the Maharaja of Darbhanga,³⁵³ as many Congress politicians were of small *zamindar* background,³⁵⁴ as was Sahajanand himself, we noted earlier.

Sahajanand's stance, moreover, was taken despite him having recently moved towards a more moderate position of *zamindari* abolition *with* compensation citing Shriman Narayan Agarwal (1912-74), an ardent Gandhian who wrote with the blessing of the Mahatma himself, to support his position,³⁵⁵ which is admittedly a rather 'un-populist' approach to take *prima facie*, although it would not last because, as we will see shortly, he reverted to his previous position of *zamindari* abolition without compensation just three years later.

Nevertheless, the main reason for Sahajanand's 1946 shift was purely practical as he realised that 'under the section 299 of the Government of India Act it is obligatory to adopt some

³⁴⁹ Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 315-18.

³⁵⁰ Guha, *Property*; Greenough, *Misery*; Siegel, *Hungry Nation*, ch.1.

³⁵¹ Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 357-8.

³⁵² Quoted in Das, *Unrest*, 201.

³⁵³ Stephen Henningham, *A Great Estate and its Landlords in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1990).

³⁵⁴ Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 357.

³⁵⁵ Shriman Narayan Agarwal, *The Gandhian Plan of Economic Development for India* (Bombay, 1944) quoted in Sahajanand, *Abolition of Zamindari* (Patna, 1946), *passim*.

principle for compensation to be paid for the transference to public ownership of any land', and thus 'the expropriation of the zamindars through legislative measures is unthinkable.'³⁵⁶

[The] Gandhian Plan ... declares that, "A reasonable compensation may also be paid to the title-holders after minutely scrutinising their titles to land", and this scrutiny ... may deprive almost all the rent-receivers of their titles ... But the Plan goes further and while demanding death duties at not less than fifty per cent of the land-value from its successors, it clears the way for wholesale expropriation almost within the same period as is needed inevitably for payment of compensation ...³⁵⁷

This passage therefore clarifies that Sahajanand endorsed Gandhian ideas regarding *zamindari* abolition as an imperfect, but best available means, to pursue his 'agrarian populist' goals of securing land for peasant proprietors among other peasant classes, a cause championed by Ranga and Singh after him too (see chapters 3-4). But to explain how Sahajanand now supported *zamindari* abolition with Gandhi's backing, despite rejecting Gandhi in 1934 for being too accommodating to *zamindars*, we must note that Gandhi had shifted from a conciliatory stance (1921-34) to promoting 'trusteeship' by 1939, where *zamindars* would benevolently hold property for tenants.³⁵⁸ However, by 1944, Gandhi's statements aligned more with *zamindari* abolition, saying, 'the kisan or the peasant ... is the son of the soil which rightly belongs or should belong to him, not to the absentee landlord or zamindar'.³⁵⁹ We will, however, explore the reasons for Gandhi's changing views further in chapter 3, as it was partly the result of the influence of Ranga.

Nevertheless, Sahajanand's disillusionment with the pace of *zamindari* abolition in Bihar was what ultimately led him to finally resign from Congress on 6 December 1948.³⁶⁰ In his *Maharudra ka Mahatandav* (1949) pamphlet, published after his resignation, Sahajanand invoked the myth of

³⁵⁶ Sahajanand, *Abolition*, 18-19.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 27; cf. Agarwal, *Plan*, 62.

³⁵⁸ M. K. Gandhi, 'Theory of Trusteeship', *Harijan*, 3-6-1939, 145.

³⁵⁹ M. K. Gandhi, 'Hints for Constructive Workers', [1944] in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, vol. 78, 219-20, https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/cwmg_volume_thumbview/Nzg=#page/1/mode/2up, (Accessed 11/09/25).

³⁶⁰ Das, *Unrest*, 181, 181n149.

Lord Shiva's *tandav* by quoting the Sanskrit hymn *Shiva Mahimna Stotra*,³⁶¹ to endorse a violent revolution:

It is said that when Lord Shiva dances the dance of destruction, tired of widespread injustice and atrocities and with ear-piercing cries, ... [the] land starts going to hell due to the tapping of his feet, the moon, [and] the sun and the stars fall down ... The sky ... [falls] to pieces and it looks like heaven or the dwelling place of Lord Vishnu will break and be submerged in the soil. Although this dance of Lord Shiva is done ... to remove those injustices, atrocities and suffering, ... the primary result of it ... [is] opposite - the destruction is violent but ... the suffering is removed.³⁶²

By contrast to Ranadive's strategy which, owing to his trade union background was biased towards the Bolshevik revolutionary model of 1917 of seizing power through urban worker militias,³⁶³ Sahajanand's arguments in *Maharudra ka Mahatandav* (1949) were exclusively rural in their orientation and application. Hence why Sahajanand prioritised the 'half proletariats of the village' rather than the 'full proletariat of the cities and factories'.³⁶⁴ Indeed, the specific rural classes that Sahajanand thought should benefit from this revolution were the:

[S]emi-proletariat or ... [the] agricultural labourer, those who have either no land or very little, and the petty peasants, who somehow help themselves [for subsistence] and live on their land.³⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Sahajanand's call to arms was neither immediate nor direct. He predicted that this agrarian revolution would 'happen anyhow, very soon, certainly by 1957'.³⁶⁶ In *Maharudra ka Mahatandav*, Sahajanand also makes no reference to Mao's ideas or the Telangana uprisings, although Pandey says that Sahajanand made a speech which encouraged communists to join the latter in 1949.³⁶⁷ While this claim is plausible as Sahajanand was still in contact with Communists then,³⁶⁸ Sahajanand also remained involved in disputes over *bakasht* land after independence. As reported on 2 December 1947 by J. C. Mathur, then District Magistrate, Gaya:

³⁶¹ 'Shiva Mahimna Stotra' [Hymn About the Greatness of Shiva], *Vyākhyā* [Interpretation], <https://www.vyakhya.org/sms-toc/s16/>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

³⁶² Sahajanand, 'Maharudra ka Mahatandav' [*The Destructive Dance of the Great Lord Shiva*] [1949] in Sharma, *Rachnavali*, vol. 2, 563.

³⁶³ Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 278; cf. Ali Jan, 'Communist Thought', 134-49.

³⁶⁴ Sahajanand, 'Maharudra', 562.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 564.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 563.

³⁶⁷ Pandey, *Sahajanand*, 110-11.

³⁶⁸ Das, *Unrest*, 181n150.

[R]egarding the agrarian dispute over the bakasht land in village Kusi ... There has been a dispute at Kusi ... and the Chairman ... had told me that he did not find possession to be of the tenants ... I have not had any talk with ... Swami Sahajanand about this dispute, but I have doubts a reasonable attitude would succeed ...³⁶⁹

Indeed, Mathur's note also includes a copy of a document produced a few days earlier by the S. D. O.³⁷⁰ of Aurangabad³⁷¹ which stated further regarding Sahajanand and Jadunandan Sharma (1896-1975), another key Sahajanand ally from a Bhumihar background who was also involved in the 1930s *bakasht* struggles:³⁷²

The decision is bound to go against the tenants as they did not prove their case satisfactorily ... There are only two alternative [*ji*] left now. Either the Arbitration Board will have to be reconstituted with another Chairman or decision of the present Board will be published which the tenants will not accept ... Jadunandan Sharma is bound to resort to direct action and if he will be arrested Swami Sahajanand Saraswati will take his place ...³⁷³

These passages show that Sahajanand's default remained trying to influence the decisions of arbitration boards and do not appear to suggest any effort to organise a guerilla war against the Indian state, which *Maharudra ka Mahatandav* does not sanction either. Also, while Sahajanand discusses Mao's ideas in *Kranti aur Sanyukt Morcha* (1943),³⁷⁴ his comments mostly concern Mao's experiences of working in a 'united front',³⁷⁵ with Chiang Kai-Shek (1887-1945) and the Chinese nationalists in response to the Japanese invasion of China in 1937,³⁷⁶ and less the roots of Mao's eventual agrarian revolution.³⁷⁷ So, while Sahajanand's invocation of Shiva's *tandav* is interesting given that the 'Indianisation' of Communist ideas has been a strong theme of recent historiography,³⁷⁸ to describe Sahajanand as a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist, or Maoist, is inappropriate in my view.³⁷⁹

³⁶⁹ 'Copy of D. O. No. 1470/C', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 8, 994.

³⁷⁰ Sub-Divisional Officer.

³⁷¹ In southern Bihar.

³⁷² Kuwajima, *Peasant Leaders*, 58-67ff.

³⁷³ 'Copy of D. O. No.-472C.', in Kumar, *Kisan Movement*, vol. 8, 994-5.

³⁷⁴ Sahajanand, 'Kranti?', 222-30.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 223-8.

³⁷⁶ Tetsuya Kataoka, *Resistance and Revolution in China* (Berkeley, 1974), 4-11.

³⁷⁷ Brian DeMare, *Land Wars* (Stanford, 2020), 1-25.

³⁷⁸ Ali Jan, 'Communist Thought', 5-32, 103-123; cf. Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts*, 1-26, 102-49; Charu Gupta, *Hindi Hindu Histories* (Albany, 2024), 248-311.

³⁷⁹ Cf. Das, *Unrest*, 141-2, 181-3; Pandey, *Sahajanand*, 179-80, 223; Sharma, 'Bhumika', 7, 21-2, 36-8, 40-1.

On the contrary, I suggest that Sahajanand's ideology should ultimately be seen as a radical form of 'agrarian populism'. From 1948-50, Sahajanand was leading his own party, the AIUKS, the constitution of which stated its goal as:

[T]he achievement of complete freedom for the Kisans from economic, social, political and other exploitations by the establishment of a Union of Socialist Republics of India wherein all power shall rest in the toiling masses.³⁸⁰

Moreover, in 1949, Sahajanand stated that the AIUKS:

[R]epresents and ... fights for all those who live by the cultivation of and toiling on the soil. All these different strata among the Kisans will have to combine and fight for the removal of all the fetters imposed by capitalism and landlordism and sahu-kars.³⁸¹ In short, they must fight for complete political and socio-economic independence ...³⁸²

In this document, Sahajanand also called for the re-distribution of land held by landlords above a ceiling of 50 acres, higher than the ceiling of 27.5 acres proposed for all farms by Singh in 1968 (see chapter 4), and the establishment of cooperative and collective farms worked by landless labourers and poor peasants. However, this was not a call for large-scale collectivisation, as Sahajanand envisaged that some of this land would be given to landless peasants alongside peasants in possession of 'less than 10 acres for a family of five' who were both permitted a maximum of 25 acres 'for self cultivation' with no 'Kisan family' permitted more than 50 acres.³⁸³

Most importantly, however, these goals were to be achieved democratically as Sahajanand argued for a 'parliamentary programme and activities' which would 'prepare the Kisans for the decisive onslaught on the citadel of reaction and vested interests'.³⁸⁴ However, he did not reject extra-parliamentary organising on account of this new commitment, which is clear from his argument that parliamentary tactics:

[N]ot only succeed in securing the peasantry some timely succour and relief ... but they also expose the dominant leadership and their government in the country ... [and] gradually convince the Kisan masses of the hollowness of the constitutional methods ... Thus, the

³⁸⁰ *The Constitution* (Patna, 1948), 1.

³⁸¹ Money lenders.

³⁸² *Programme*, 10-11.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

reliance for the emancipation of [sic] masses can and must be placed on the extra-parliamentarian activities, the constitutional fight simply supplementing them.³⁸⁵

In some respects, therefore, Sahajanand appears to be advocating a form of electoral communism, which bears some similarities with the views taken by the important Keralan Communist leader E. M. S. Namboodiripad (1909-1998), who was aligned with the CPI faction of the AIKS in the 1930s.³⁸⁶ Indeed, while we have noted that, c.1948-50, the CPI was pursuing an all-out revolutionary strategy, following the suppression of the Telangana Rebellions, the CPI, in October 1951, made a renewed commitment to loyalist opposition to the Congress government as a law and constitution abiding party under General Secretary Ajoy Ghosh (1909-1962), which increasingly prioritised regional organisation with the aim of taking power in individual states rather than impose communism from the centre in Delhi.³⁸⁷ The culmination of this strategy was Namboodiripad's leadership of the CPI to victory in the 1957 Kerala state elections, where they attempted a 'peaceful transition to communism'. Although in practice, their agrarian policy, discussed further in chapter 3, was quite moderate in practice. Thus, while the Kerala CPI government did introduce significant agrarian reforms by introducing ceilings on agricultural property, they did not, at least immediately, introduce collective farms,³⁸⁸ as Sahajanand had advocated for above.

Additionally, Sahajanand and Namboodiripad, both Brahmins interested in Marxist ideas,³⁸⁹ defined the peasantry differently. The latter ultimately believed, following Lenin, Stalin and the Chinese Communist leader Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969), that the agricultural labourer was the real peasant and that the collectivisation of peasant holdings must ultimately lead to an industrialised, socialist economy.³⁹⁰ By contrast, while Sahajanand did support state-led industrial development

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 12.

³⁸⁶ E. M. S. Namboodiripad, *How I Became a Communist* (Trivandrum, 1976), 156ff.

³⁸⁷ Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 306ff.

³⁸⁸ Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi* (New York, 2007), 293-6.

³⁸⁹ Cf. Robin Jeffrey, 'Matriliney, Marxism, and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala', *JAS*, 38, 1 (1978), 80-2, 90ff; Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in South India* (Cambridge, 1994), 11ff; idem, *The Blindness of Insight* (Pondicherry, 2006), 32-72.

³⁹⁰ E. M. S. Namboodiripad, *The Peasant in National Economic Construction* (New Delhi, 1954), 73-86.

to address unemployment in overpopulated rural areas - aligning with certain Communist positions - he also advocated for the state's assistance in turbocharging 'decaying cottage industries'.³⁹¹ This placed him at odds with orthodox Communist views, which, following Lenin, often dismiss such sectors as 'petty bourgeois'.³⁹² In this respect, Sahajanand's stance aligned more closely with 'agrarian populists' like Ram (see chapter 1), Ranga (chapter 3), and Singh (chapter 4), who championed rural-based development and the protection of traditional livelihoods.

Furthermore, Sahajanand's calls for the re-distribution of land and the establishment of cooperative farms also appear to have been inspired by Bihar's own recent experiments in cooperation. Indeed, in the late 1930s, the Bihar government introduced state-run cooperative cane supply unions to address issues in the Bihar sugar industry which included, *inter alia*, the difficulty the sugar factories had in competing with the traditional, artisanal sugar producers in the state, who produced *gur* and *khandsari*³⁹³ with low-level technology, because transaction fees were very high in purchasing cane supplies from the countryside's various cane growers.³⁹⁴ At least two of these cooperative societies, moreover, started to engage in the cooperative farming of cane by 1945 and 1949 respectively.³⁹⁵

Sahajanand, meanwhile, had, as recently as 1947, addressed the Bihar's Provincial Cooperative Sugarcane Conference, where he stated that 'the organisation of sugarcane growers' societies will ... be very helpful' in ensuring cane prices were kept high and thus in the interest of the peasants who went on to sell them,³⁹⁶ demonstrating a shrewd understanding of the political-economy of

³⁹¹ *Programme*, 22.

³⁹² V. I. Lenin, 'The Heritage We Renounce', [1898] in idem, *CW*, vol. 2, 516ff.

³⁹³ Artisanal sugars.

³⁹⁴ D. M. Attwood and B. S. Baviskar, 'Why Do Some Co-operatives Work but Not Others?', *EPW*, 22, 26 (1987), A-40.

³⁹⁵ *Report of the Committees of the Panel on Land Reforms* [1956] (New Delhi, 1959), 212-13.

³⁹⁶ Sahajanand, 'Ken Growers Kooperativ Konaphrens' ['Cane Growers Cooperative Conference'] in Sharma, *Rachnamali*, vol. 6, 248.

the industry, especially the conflict between mill-owners and peasants regarding the type of cane grown and its logistics.³⁹⁷

Therefore, when Sahajanand's expansive definition of the peasantry as defined against money lenders, *zamindars* and capitalists plus his support for peasant proprietorship and cottage industries is appreciated, alongside his support for 'co-operative and State marketing' to stop 'the exploitation of peasants by middlemen' and 'State credit and co-operative and Land Mortgage' in the AIUKS programme,³⁹⁸ in addition to his renewed demand for Congress to finally abolish the *zamindari* system and indeed other systems of landlordism without compensation,³⁹⁹ which it ultimately achieved in 1950, albeit *with compensation*, and which also allowed for the peasants' whose interests he had championed in Barahiya Tal to become the owners of the lands on which they had previously worked as tenants,⁴⁰⁰ and the fact that the independent AIUKS participated in independent India's first elections of 1951-2,⁴⁰¹ albeit after Sahajanand's death in 1950,⁴⁰² makes the case for seeing him as an exponent of a radical 'agrarian populist' ideology a possible alternative to existing interpretations.

IV: Conclusion

This chapter has suggested Sahajanand's ideology was a radical form of 'agrarian populism', which put various peasants against *zamindars* plus other 'elites' and was rooted in specific stances on land reform, cooperatives, and parliamentary democracy. More left leaning than Chhotu Ram's earlier, loyalist version in Punjab, although bearing many similarities with it too, his thought was shaped by Marxist-Leninist influences after 1939 and Bihar's political context. His key contribution was the radicalisation of an initially moderate agrarian creed.

³⁹⁷ Shahid Amin, 'Unequal Antagonists', *EPW*, 16, 42/43 (1981), PE24.

³⁹⁸ *Programme*, 17-19, 22.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁴⁰⁰ Das, *Unrest*, 134; Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 362-9.

⁴⁰¹ 'Statistical Report on General Elections, 1951 to the First Lok Sabha', *Election Commission of India*, vol. 1, 2, <https://www.ceo.kerala.gov.in/ceokerala/pdf/LOKSABHA-HISTORY/1951-LS.pdf>, (Accessed 18/09/25).

⁴⁰² Das, *Unrest*, 141-2.

Overall, therefore, Sahajanand was unique among Indian ‘agrarian populists’ in his serious, if inconsistent, interest in Marxism-Leninism. The fundamental reason for this, perhaps, alongside his exposure to Communist literature in prison among other factors, was the harsher political economy and greater extent of rural poverty in Bihar compared with the regions associated with Ram, Ranga, and Singh, which, as we will see in Chapters 3–4, which were relatively wealthier agricultural areas. Upon a provisional typology of ‘agrarian populism’ in India, Sahajanand’s ‘agrarian populism’, which might be called ‘the populism of radical Marxists’, would be placed at the far left of the spectrum.

Chapter 3: ‘Democratic *Kisan Mazdoor Praja Raj*’ (Peasant’s and Working People’s Rule): N. G. Ranga (1900-1995) and the Reconfiguration of Agrarian Populism in Nehruvian India, c.1950-64

This chapter investigates the ‘agrarian populist’ thought of N.G. Ranga, founding President of the Swatantra Party, and situates him within the broader political and intellectual history of ‘agrarian populism’ in India by tracing how this doctrine was used in a more all-India and coalitional political context. In so doing, it locates Ranga’s politics beyond existing frameworks which have mainly studied him within the caste and class politics of his native coastal Andhra, especially to understand Communist politics there,¹ the factional politics of the Madras Presidency,² or the political history of early independent India.³ Alternatively, the chapter seeks to explain Ranga’s intellectual and political awakening (c.1900–1964), tracing his transition from academic to full-time politician in 1930, his early Gandhian and socialist positions, subsequent turn against the left, and eventual membership of the Swatantra Party, traditionally characterised as ‘conservative’ by scholars of post-independence India.

In the existing literature, there are five important arguments. In 1967, Erdman located Ranga within the ‘conservatism’ of the Swatantra Party, defining ‘conservatism’ in the Indian context as an ideology rooted in the aristocratic and professional classes which attempted to resist state enforced change, promoted the leadership of society by elite groups and defended the family, caste and village via reference to a range of western conservative theoreticians.⁴ His key point is that the ‘conservative’ style preference of Swatantra party leader C. Rajagopalachari (1878-1972) for ‘gradualist’ change in the rural economy influenced Ranga, especially as the introduction of modern, machine based capitalist mill industries threatened the livelihood of traditional

¹ Selig S. Harrison, ‘Caste and the Andhra Communists’, *APSR*, 50, 2 (1956), 385-403; Myron Weiner, *Party Building in a New Nation* (Chicago, 1967), 140-2; Carolyn M. Elliot, ‘Caste and Faction Among the Dominant Caste’, in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (New Delhi, 1970), 144-55; D. N. Dhanagare, ‘The Politics of Survival’, *SB*, 24, 1 (1975), 42-5.

² David Washbrook, ‘Country Politics’, *MAS*, 7, 3 (1973), 518-21, 521n205; Baker, *Politics*, 207-10.

³ Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London, 2004), 234-44; Guha, *India*, 330-1; Misra, *VCT*, 280-1, 309; Gyanesh Kudaisya, *A Republic in the Making* (New Delhi, 2017), 86, 92.

⁴ Howard L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism* (Cambridge, 1967), 1-9.

communities of small-scale hand-loom weavers, which he supports by citing Ranga's statements in a Swatantra Party pamphlet.⁵

Erdman's attempt to situate Ranga within an intellectual history of Indian conservatism is, however, somewhat undercut by his recognition of leftist aspects of Ranga's thought, evidenced by his hostility to India's aristocratic, Brahmanical priestly, and industrial capitalist communities - key Swatantra constituencies. Also, Erdman ultimately describes Ranga as 'first and foremost a peasant populist' motivated by 'his conception of what is good for an independent peasantry'. Even so, the scope of his study did not allow him to fully explore the precise nature of Ranga's 'populism', i.e. his conception of the 'people'/peasantry and how they informed his policy proposals regarding land reform, cooperatives and democratic strategy. However, Erdman did recognise Ranga's past opposition to the *zamindari* system, his present antipathy to land nationalisation and the cooperative re-organisation of small peasant holdings, and his strong hostility to communism in line with the general Swatantra stance.⁶

By contrast to Erdman, Frankel argued that Ranga was a 'Marxist'. Situating him within debates about rural reform in the 1920s and 1930s, she stresses Ranga's efforts to build up independent class organisations to advance peasant interests and achieve a socialist revolution in Andhra. To substantiate this, Frankel cites a 1938 AIKS manifesto where he argued that: 'so long as feudalism and capitalism are not done away with, real and substantive power cannot come [*sic*] in the hands of the masses.'⁷

A problem with Frankel's argument, however, is that while the Madras government was suspicious of Ranga's movements in the 1930s for being 'communistic' in nature, in practice, he ultimately strongly opposed revolutionary socialist attempts to overthrow the Indian government, as we will discuss further below. Also, Frankel's description of Ranga as a Marxist does not comply with her simultaneous acknowledgement that while in the AIKS, Ranga sought

⁵ Ibid., 89n31, 300n31.

⁶ Ibid., 67, 85-6, 89,

⁷ Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy* (Princeton, 1978), 55.

to advance the interests of ‘small landowners’, ‘tenants’ and ‘landless labourers’ which can be observed in the documents in the AIKS document she cites. In other words, Ranga, like Sahajanand and Ram before him (see chapters 1-2), did not adopt a strict Leninist definition of the peasantry, which emphasised the agricultural proletariat as the priority for political mobilisation in rural areas. As a result, a ‘populist’ view of Ranga’s ideology, first suggested by Erdman, is likely more accurate.

In this respect, Brass places Ranga within a broader global flowering of ‘populist’ peasant movements that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century in response to capitalist crises, especially the 1930s worldwide economic depression. Brass defines this ‘populism’ as an ‘agrarian myth’ discourse, which stresses ‘the desirability/feasibility and naturalness of small-scale economic activity (peasant family farming, artisanry) in the countryside’. Consequently, peasant populists generally favour ‘rural cultural forms/institutions based on this ... namely, the family, village, regional, ethnic and religious identities which are perceived as being derived from Nature’, which means, to Brass, that ‘peasant populism’ tends to reinforce right-wing politics. On Ranga’s thought specifically, Brass argues that it contains ‘all the elements of populist discourse (peasant = nature = nation)’.⁸ To support this, Brass draws on Ranga’s autobiography and one of his ideological works,⁹ pointing to Ranga’s adoption of ‘populist’ anti-socialist and anti-capitalist stances, as to Brass ‘populism’, unlike Marxism, only opposes capitalism in its ‘macro’ as opposed to its ‘micro’ form, and his advocacy for ‘community’ democratic rule at the local level based on tribal chieftain hierarchies. Brass also emphasises Ranga’s decision to prioritise national over class identity and his ‘idealisation’ of traditional family-based subsistence agriculture conducted by an undifferentiated peasantry. He then says that Ranga maintained these positions after independence, acting against Marxism, socialism, secularism, and ‘non-Hindu forms of otherness’ and that he also opposed state-led development and planning due to

⁸ Tom Brass, *Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism* (London, 2000), 1, 9, 15-16, 53n64.

⁹ Cited in *ibid.*, 53n64.

its implications for peasant proprietors and traditional family-based farming. Finally, for Brass, citing Erdman, the equation of populism with the political right is confirmed through Ranga's acceptance of the conservative Swatantra Party Presidency in 1959.¹⁰

While Brass' approach is strong, an issue is that while Ranga certainly used some ideas which can be interpreted as being 'conservative' in the sense of appealing to the extra-human origins of society and a desire to ensure change is regulated and 'organic', (see section III), his ideas and rhetoric were overwhelmingly socialistic in presentation and many of his objections to Communism were from a democratic socialist perspective. This is essential to acknowledge if we are to explain, an outcome which Brass does not make explicit, that after the defeat of the Swatantra Party at the 1971 elections and subsequent decline of the party, Ranga rejoined Congress under the 'socialist' leadership of Indira Gandhi in 1972, which he justified by saying that, *inter alia*, he had become disillusioned with the stress Swatantra had placed on defending the 'fundamental right to property', enshrined in the Indian Constitution of 1950, compared to the appeals of 'Indirajee [Indira Gandhi] ... for the urgent necessity to condition it in order to ... mount an effective offensive against the dismal depths of poverty of our masses.'¹¹

Post-Brass, Cavale Rao provides a different, more nationalist perspective by seeing Ranga as a 'heterodox' Gandhian thinker. Thus, he notes Ranga's agreement with Gandhian thinkers that village communities were central to Indian nationhood, and rural interests should be prioritised in development policy. However, it is argued, Ranga differed from the conventional Gandhian view of villages as self-sufficient economic communities focused on subsistence production and 'customary exchange' by placing 'greater emphasis on equalising the relationship between cities and the countryside within a broadly commodity-centered framework of economic development'. Ranga achieved this, Cavale Rao says, through two 'discursive shifts': casting peasant family farms in terms of money from selling farm produce and linking peasant

¹⁰ Ibid., 26-7, 27n64, 51n55, 53n64.

¹¹ N. G. Ranga, 'Marching with the Resurgent Masses', (1972), N.G. Ranga Papers, NAI, S. No. 30, 1-2.

community autonomy into a wider commodity-centered economy. Consequently, in Cavale Rao's scheme, Ranga contributed to reconfiguring Indian village communities in nationalist thought by focusing debates on existing villages rather than the abstract 'village community' idea - generated by his 1920s rural economic studies, which was part of a broader turn in rural economics in India towards 'empiricism' and 'presentism' through fieldwork.¹²

But while this approach is helpful for understanding Ranga's early career and strong initial Gandhian influence, it considers Ranga primarily within Gandhian thought rather than wider debates among the Indian left, which were equally, if not more, important in generating Ranga's 'agrarian populist' ideology. It also slightly overlooks how Ranga's own 'agrarian populist' ideological approach, which for example promoted cooperatives in services rather than Gandhian thinkers who came to promote them in production (i.e. in farming itself) by the late 1940s which took them surprisingly close to Communist positions, differed from Gandhi's thought and, at times, also influenced Gandhi's thinking, themes we will explore further in sections I-II.

Finally, the most recent reading of Ranga's ideology comes from Balasubramanian who studies Ranga within the Swatantra Party's 'economic conservatism' by investigating the economic ideas of party leaders and associated networks. Balasubramanian foregrounds the core 'economically conservative' idea of 'free economy', which originated in the writings of the Bombay-based Libertarian Social Institute (LSI). LSI founder Ranchoddas Lotvala defined 'free economy' as 'an economy which is free from monopoly, privilege and control of State in various forms, as for instance, monopoly of exchange, credit, quotas, licenses, etc.'¹³

While Swatantra Party Leader C. Rajagopalachari certainly used this idea,¹⁴ Balasubramanian's account does not clarify whether Ranga directly invoked this 'free economy' concept himself. As

¹² Karthik Rao Cavale, 'The Production of Rurality', (Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2020), 35, 62-3.

¹³ Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 67.

¹⁴ Ibid., 150.

we will see in the chapter, Ranga tended to describe his ideology in terms of ‘democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*’,¹⁵ which sounds more ‘agrarian populist’. Also, Balasubramanian admits that Ranga operated essentially independently of LSI networks, arguing he ‘had long pursued a distinct yet complementary set of ideas and practices.’¹⁶

Overall, Balasubramanian ultimately makes a complex argument that Ranga’s Swatantra participation makes him a ‘conservative’ in national politics, on account of his opposition to land nationalisation and collective farming, a ‘leftist’ in global affairs, owing to his advocacy of collaboration between agrarian nations for ‘concessional terms of trade’ in global institutions and participation in Afro-Asian solidarity movements, but an ‘agrarian economic internationalist’ overall.¹⁷ So, while this is an illuminating argument, which also acknowledges Ranga’s contributions towards *zamindari* abolition and strong belief in democracy,¹⁸ it does not fully capture the ‘agrarian populist’ aspects of Ranga’s conception of the peasantry and its relationship with other ‘elite’ groups alongside his support for cooperation in services (i.e. credit, marketing, etc) in the terms that we have defined it in this study.

The main debate in the literature therefore concerns how to classify Ranga’s ideology and opinion on it remains divided. In this chapter, I will take Ranga to be an ‘agrarian populist’ which, like Ram and Sahajanand before him, led him to precise stances regarding land reform, democratic and cooperative policy. The following chapter, therefore, recovers and analyses Ranga’s own expression of an ‘agrarian populist’ ideology, which he elaborated upon at length via his ‘democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*’ slogan in his key work *Credo of World Peasantry* (1957), which he said was intended as ‘a contribution to the interpretation of that ideal in so far as it applies to peasants’ and would defend ‘peasant economy and its content of self-employment as

¹⁵ Peasant’s and Working People’s Rule.

¹⁶ Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 163ff.

¹⁷ Ibid., 175, 179.

¹⁸ Ibid., 168-9, 172.

the quintessence of Democratic Socialism' to provide a non-communist 'scientific Ism' for Indian peasants.¹⁹

The chapter thus begins with an exploration of Ranga's background, education and early publication record, explaining the importance of Gandhian and Fabian socialist ideas in Ranga's early intellectual life to the initial peasant anchored focus of his 'agrarian populism' which was the product of his unique background, when compared to Ram and our other figures, in that he was educated abroad at Oxford, and how his commitment to parliamentarianism, land reform and cooperatives came about in consequence. The second section charts how Ranga's 'agrarian populism' developed more fully in 1950s India to establish a more elaborate stance on cooperatives, supporting them in consumption but not in production, which took him away somewhat from Gandhian thought and represents, in an important sense, a synthesis of the views of Ram and Sahajanand as they mainly supported service cooperatives but also farming cooperatives in some limited circumstances. Finally, it will conclude by evaluating how Ranga sought to put his vision into practice through his own 'agrarian populist' KLP Party and the Swatantra Party, which saw Ranga's 'agrarian populist' ideology take on some 'conservative' inflections while remaining ideologically distinct given his 'agrarian populist' positioning against the corrupt and 'elitist' urban bureaucrat.

The chapter argues that Ranga's ideology, which claimed to represent the interests of an undifferentiated peasantry against various urban 'elites', money lenders, *zamindars* and a new 'elite' of bureaucrats and economic planning officials, drawing on Hindu jurisprudential thought and Gandhism and expressed in precise policies on land reform, cooperatives and parliamentary democracy, was ultimately a form of 'agrarian populism'. Simultaneously, it also acknowledges that Ranga's 'agrarian populism' was relatively more 'conservative', when compared to Sahajanand's, as it came to reject the use of cooperative and collective farming as the new basis

¹⁹ N. G. Ranga, *Credo of World Peasantry* (Nidubrolu, 1957), xv; idem, *Fight for Freedom* (New Delhi, 1968), 419.

for Indian agricultural production which was conducted as part of a wider solution to India's developmental problems as envisaged by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

In some respects, Ranga's intervention within the political and intellectual history of 'agrarian populism' was thus to take the creed back towards the more relatively moderate kind espoused by Chhotu Ram in 1920s and 1930s Punjab, especially as like Ram, Ranga was strongly opposed to Communism in India. After all, Communism was far more of a threat in Ranga's Andhra than it was in Ram's Punjab, or indeed in Sahajanand's Bihar, as the Telangana Rebellions of 1946-52 had been conducted within the region - thus, there was much more at stake for Ranga regarding the 'correct' interpretation of 'socialism' in this respect, especially as the movement had a strong flavour of cultural separatism about it,²⁰ and Ranga was predominately an agrarian rather than a linguistic nationalist.

However, Ranga's 'agrarian populism', on account of the intervention of his erstwhile friend and colleague Sahajanand, was nevertheless, unlike Ram's, wrapped up in a more explicitly socialistic language which reflects Ranga's participation in the leftist AIKS in the 1930s and of course the dominance of socialistic language which was imposed, although without ideological uniformity, on the discourse of early independent India via the 'Nehruvian Consensus'.²¹ As a result, Ranga could therefore not ignore questions of cooperative and collective farming and neither could any subsequent 'agrarian populist' in India pre-1980. But, as already hinted at, Ranga was willing to make some concessions to this perspective like Charan Singh after him (see chapter 4).

Furthermore, the chapter also argues that Ranga's relatively 'conservative' rendering of 'agrarian populist' ideology in India was in large part a consequence of the passage of *zamindari* abolition across India's various states after independence. As Gould has argued, the abolition of

²⁰ Selig S. Harrison, *India* (Princeton, 1960), 222-3; cf. Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion and Politics in South India* (Bloomington, 2009), 22-55ff.

²¹ Rajni Kothari, 'Political Consensus in India', *EPW*, 4, 41 (1969), 1639-1644; idem, *Politics in India* (Boston, 1970), 168-223; Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India* (New York and Chichester, 2010), 26-7.

the *zamindar* removed a central antagonist of the agricultural tenant and their assumption of proprietary rights led them to oppose more radical agrarian policies.²² Hence why ‘agrarian populist’ ideologues had to adapt, and this point is underlined by a recognition that Government of India attempts to introduce cooperative farms in India during the 1950s were intended to support state-led heavy industrial development in the country. In opposition, Ranga started to articulate an alternative, ‘agrarian populist’ developmental model for India, which would prioritise agriculture and rural industries thereby building on the incomplete attempts of Ram and Sahajanand. In so doing, Ranga paved the way for the emergence of Singh in national politics who developed it into an even more intellectually formidable creed and built independent agrarian parties in more effective fashion.

I: From ‘Kisan Raj’ to ‘Kisan-Mazdoor Praja Raj’: The Development of Ranga’s Populism, c.1900-50

This section explores Ranga’s background to explain how his ‘agrarian populism’ developed from the late 1920s to the 1940s. The section argues that Ranga’s ‘agrarian populist’ ideology developed from a purely peasant focused stance of ‘*kisan raj*’,²³ which championed the interests of middling Kamma proprietors against urban ‘elites’ with Gandhian and Fabian socialist aspects via policies of land reform, cooperatives and parliamentary democracy, into a much more expansive ‘left populist’ idiom of ‘*kisan mazdoor praja raj*’, which paid attention both to other agricultural classes, such as labourers and artisans, the proletariat and professional workers, in the context of an intellectual debate among the left about the nature of the peasantry, particularly those around the AIKS and under the influence of other important left thinkers such as Bose, who, as we saw in chapter 2, was also important in Sahajanand’s ideological development.

Ranga was born in 1900 at Nidubrolu village in Guntur district, coastal Andhra, which lay in the Northern Circars division of the Madras Presidency of British India.²⁴ During early British

²² Harold A. Gould, ‘Gandhi, Marx, and Charan Singh’, in William Pinch (ed.), *Speaking of Peasants* (New Delhi, 2008), 92-3.

²³ Peasant rule.

²⁴ Ranga, *Fight*, 1-3; Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 164.

rule, Guntur was a very poor area with low quality land and an immiserated people on the brink of famine.²⁵ However, colonial irrigation projects transformed Andhra's Krishna delta from a 'dry' to a 'wet region', which led to dramatic increases in agricultural production, particularly of rice.²⁶ The Kammas, a *shudra* community to which Ranga belonged, were the largest single caste in the district, far outstripping Brahmins, other peasant castes, 'untouchables' plus minority Christian and Muslim communities, and who made up 26% of Guntur's population by 1921, were a particular beneficiary of these transformations.²⁷ By the 1930s, their increasing proficiency in English after taking to modern education was increasingly enabling them to move beyond agriculture, while retaining links to the countryside, and invest their capital in several lucrative industries, including real estate and film.²⁸

Ranga's immediate family clearly shared in the general development of Guntur district given his 1968 recollection that 'my grandparents from the mother's side were very successful peasants' and that his grandfather Ramanayya was 'famous in our neighbouring villages for his physical powers ... and success in agriculture'. Therefore, while Ranga recalls that his grandparents on his father's side were less wealthy, his immediate family had inherited substantial amounts of land and property, which included 'fairly large-sized holdings of fertile land both wet and dry and extensive house-sites ... and cattle sheds'. And while they had some debts, Ranga's parents were able to save substantial sums of money through hard work, economies, and improving the fertility of the family's land.²⁹

The resources acquired by Ranga's family allowed them to send him to the University of Oxford in 1920 as preparation for the Indian Civil Service exams. The idea was that he would

²⁵ Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Guntur District* (Oxford, 1965), 2ff.

²⁶ Washbrook, *Politics*, 90-1; Sunil Amrith, *Unruly Waters* (London, 2020), chs. 1-2; Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 165.

²⁷ Weiner, *Party Building*, 136; Yamada Keiko, 'Politics and Representation of Caste Identity in Regional Historiography', *IESHR*, 45, 3 (2008), 356.

²⁸ Carol Boyack Upadhy, 'From Kulak to Capitalist', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1988), 54-109; S. V. Srinivas, 'Making of a Peasant Industry', *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies*, 1, 2 (2010), 169-188; Dalel Benbabaali, 'Caste, Dominance and Territory in South India', *MAS*, 52, 6 (2018), 1946ff; Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 165.

²⁹ Ranga, *Fight*, 4-8.

secure a job to assist them in their dealings with the Revenue and Public Works departmental officials of the Madras Presidency government.³⁰

After arriving in Oxford, however, Ranga started reading Fabian socialist pamphlets in the context of the recent rise to power of the Labour Party (1900-) in Britain.³¹ In reaction to news of Gandhi's imprisonment during the Non-Cooperation campaign in 1922 (see chapter 2), Ranga then abandoned preparation for the civil service exams to study economics:

I decided to become a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, to work for national freedom. But would that be enough? ... Could we be free ... from the capitalist exploitation, against which, socialists and labourites were struggling so hard in contemporary England? So, I had to go further and decide upon the awakening and organisation of the peasants ... I would prepare myself through my studies at Oxford to serve our peasants and develop for them whatever political leadership might be possible.³²

While at Oxford, Ranga produced a thesis on the Madras Presidency's handloom industry, supervised by the English economist and Fabian socialist Gilbert Slater (1864-1938), which, according to Ranga, 'supported' one million workers.³³ This work bore a strong Gandhian imprint which is clear from its assertion that:

There is a wave of enthusiasm for art and artistic goods passing among the Andhras ... formed by the Non-Co-operation Movement.³⁴

Post graduation, Ranga then became an academic when he was appointed as Professor of History and Economics at Paichayya's College in Madras,³⁵ c.1926-9.³⁶ As an academic, he published a number of articles with the research underpinning them ultimately resulting in a major investigation into Indian rural conditions: *Economic Organisation of Indian Villages* (1926-9).³⁷ The most important of these articles sought to tackle rural unemployment by encouraging the development of 'agricultural industries',³⁸ an absolutely central Gandhian theme which stressed

³⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

³¹ David Torrance, *The Wild Men* (London, 2024).

³² Ranga, *Fight*, 89.

³³ N. G. Ranga, *The Economics of Handloom* (Bombay, 1930), 1; cf. Karuna Dietrich Wielenga, *Weaving Histories* (Oxford, 2020), ch. 2 and *passim*.

³⁴ Ranga, *Handloom*, 296.

³⁵ Modern Chennai.

³⁶ Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 168.

³⁷ N. G. Ranga, *Economic Organisation of Indian Villages*, 2 Vols. (Bezwada, 1926-9).

³⁸ N. G. Ranga, 'Agricultural Industries', *Indian Journal of Economics*, VII (1927), 492-506.

that rural industrial development, and especially the hand-spinning of cloth, was necessary because India's urban classes owed it to villagers to create a market for their products and that such industries could tackle the issue of rural unemployment which Gandhi believed was the main cause of India's poverty.³⁹

Indeed, Gandhi's own views on these subjects, which had the anti-colonial angle of endeavouring to make Indians less reliant on foreign goods and foreign cloth in particular, would be fully developed during the 1930s although he had, as we saw in chapter 2, advocated the spinning of *khadi*,⁴⁰ and *swadeshi* more generally, during the Non-Cooperation movement. Thus, Ranga's 'Agricultural Industries' article contains a call for the colonial state to encourage the development of rural industries:

There are various means by which Government can encourage the adoption of subsidiary industries ... In this connection the experience of the Khadder [*sic*] movement is invaluable. Khadder enthusiasts found that though ryots, agricultural workers and their women realised the monetary advantages of hand-spinning, they were unwilling to take to that work because they were unable to get over their lethargic habits. It is necessary to remove this unwillingness to work by infusing into the masses a desire for additional comforts.⁴¹

Moreover, in an article entitled 'Hand Spinning', while Ranga acknowledged, through referring to the 1921 colonial census, that, *inter alia*, the colonial figures of 'Mr. Edye of the United Provinces and Mr. Talang of Bihar and Orissa' also supported the extension of hand-spinning in rural areas, he nevertheless quoted Gandhi's words that hand-spinning cloth was an 'occupation for the millions',⁴² a view he supported by citing works by his supervisor Slater,⁴³ the influential rural sociologist Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1917-2015),⁴⁴ and the colonial writer Calvert's research on Punjab.⁴⁵

³⁹ Ajit Kumar Dasgupta, *Gandhi's Economic Thought* (London, 1996), 26.

⁴⁰ Home-spun cloth.

⁴¹ Ranga, 'Industries', 492.

⁴² Quoted in N. G. Ranga, 'Hand Spinning', *Indian Journal of Economics*, VII (1927), 138; cf. M. K. Gandhi, 'Pure Swadeshi,' [1920], *CWMG* vol. 18, 32-4, https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/cwmg_volume_thumbview/MTg=#page/4/mode/2up (Accessed 09/11/25).

⁴³ Cited in Ranga, 'Spinning', 138n4.

⁴⁴ Cf. Bayly, *Liberties*, 283-90.

⁴⁵ Cited in Ranga, 'Spinning', 138n4.

Back in the ‘Agricultural Industries’ piece, meanwhile, Ranga also called for the Madras government ‘to develop a policy of giving some ‘relief’ to the unemployed and also to the ‘people who are unable to work’, in order to ‘encourage’ them into becoming ‘active workers’, by citing the experience of England, a country where unemployment benefits had recently been extended by the Liberal-Conservative coalition government of David Lloyd George in 1920.⁴⁶

Ranga conceded, however, that it was likely ‘impossible’ for the Indian government to implement the same policy. But he nevertheless thought it to be ‘absolutely necessary’ to provide financial support that changes based on the quantity of goods produced in industries managed by voluntary organisations and establish cooperative organisations in order to ‘finance and to market the products of such industries’.⁴⁷ Indeed, Ranga justified the first policy proposal in the following terms:

Hand-spinning ... can bid fair [*sic*] to become a very useful and profitable bye-employment on a national scale as very few other industries can. There is a constant and large demand for the products of this industry in this country and it is sure to rise as ... more people take to wearing additional clothing. Workers ... can find sufficient employment in this subsidiary industry for many days in the year and they can work in an environment most congenial for Indians. The idea of this industry is economically sound and I do not see, as a student of Economics, any objection to the State’s subsidising this industry, if it is organised on a national scale by voluntary workers.⁴⁸

To understand Ranga’s views on the second, moreover, we note that the Madras Presidency served as the ‘intellectual start’ for the cooperative moment in India,⁴⁹ as the origins of the colonial state’s Cooperative Credit Societies Act of 1904 lie in the researches of the Madras civil servant Frederick Nicholson whose influential report of 1895-7 advocated for the introduction of cooperative credit societies in Madras following his analysis of various kinds of cooperatives in Europe among other places.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* [1958] (London, 1968), 43-6.

⁴⁷ Ranga, ‘Industries’, 493.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 493-4.

⁴⁹ Bruce L. Robert Jr., ‘Agricultural Credit Cooperatives in Madras’, *IESHR*, 16, 2 (1979), 163.

⁵⁰ *Report Regarding the Possibility of Introducing Land and Agricultural Banks into the Madras Presidency*, 2 Vols. (Madras, 1895-7).

The colonial state at this time, as we saw in chapter 1 in relation to the LAA, was extremely worried about growing rural indebtedness which it believed was a key cause of famine in India, which had struck Madras severely from 1876-8 and more recently as part of the Indian famine of 1896-7, the latter having also been felt in Sahajanand's Ghazipur as we saw in chapter 2, as stated in the *Report of the Indian Famine Commission* (1901) of which Nicholson was a member.⁵¹ Credit cooperatives were thus seen as a potential solution to this problem. Therefore, Nicholson was authorised to draft the 1904 Act based on which the number of credit cooperatives in the Madras Presidency increased from 2000 to just shy of 100,000, c.1906-30.⁵²

In India more broadly, meanwhile, the cooperative movement grew rapidly after 1904 when a further law was introduced in 1912 which permitted the establishment of cooperatives in areas beyond credit societies and unions.⁵³ And it perhaps reached its pinnacle in 1928 when the Government of India's Royal Commission for Agriculture, whose report established the general thrust of government policy in this area for the next decade, declared that:

If the rural community is to be contented, happy and prosperous, local governments must regard the co-operative movement as deserving all the encouragement which it lies within their powers to give.⁵⁴

Ranga himself, meanwhile, appears to have contributed directly to the Commission's work as it has been claimed that he submitted a 'statement' to it. However, his views on its specific recommendations regarding cooperatives are unclear.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Ranga stated at the outset of volume 2 of his *Economic Organisation* that, while he had originally intended to publish it 'long before' the Royal Commission for Agriculture released its report, he nevertheless believed that said report primarily highlighted rural economic issues for public attention, with its findings broad and requiring further clarification.⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1901*, 2-3 and *passim*; cf. *Report of the Famine in the Madras Presidency During 1896 and 1897*, vol. 1 (Madras, 1898), 1-8; David Arnold, 'Famine in Peasant Consciousness and Peasant Action', in Guha, *SS III*, 62-115.

⁵² Robert Jr., 'Cooperatives', 163-4; cf. Kamenov, 'Cooperative', 106-8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India* (Bombay, 1928), 50.

⁵⁵ A. V. Ramalinga Aiyar, 'Introduction', in Ranga, *Organisation*, vol. 2, 4-5; cf. Ranga, *Fight*, 158-9.

⁵⁶ Ranga, *Organisation*, vol. 2, 7.

Ultimately, however, Ranga's interest in cooperatives appears to come more out of his interaction with Fabian socialist figures during his studies in England in the early 1920s than with the imperial context in any event. However, it should be noted here that Fabian members, not least Beatrice Webb (1858-1943), who quickly established herself, alongside her husband and fellow socialist Sidney Webb (1859-1947), as a leading Fabian socialist ideologue in the early twentieth century after the establishment of the Society in 1884,⁵⁷ had developed a strong interest in cooperatives by the time Ranga was intellectually active.⁵⁸

In this context, Ranga recounts that he attended the Labour Research Department's summer school in Scarborough, where he claims to have met 'all the prominent socialist writers and workers' of the time including G. D. H. Cole (1889-1959), an important theorist of 'guild socialism' who advocated for democratic worker control in industry although he made some effort to apply it to agriculture,⁵⁹ the latter being of special interest to Ranga given the firmly agrarian nature of his 'populism'/'peasant socialism' by contrast to the generally industrial proletarian minded Fabians. Thus, while Ranga claims that he took issue with the tendency to treat Gandhi as a 'social reactionary' in the discussions held in this setting, he nevertheless recalls a conversation with H. N. Brailsford (1873-1958), a Fabian and leading leftist journalist who at this time was calling for weekly cash payments to working class families,⁶⁰ who he exempted from the above criticism because he recognised the legitimacy of his belief in Gandhi's cause and that the 'younger lecturers' did not appreciate the priorities of 'peasant countries such as India' apparently on account of him being 'the oldest of the lecturers'.⁶¹

Furthermore, Ranga also credits Brailsford with an important influence on his thinking regarding cooperatives:

⁵⁷ A. M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics* (Cambridge, 1962), 50-7.

⁵⁸ Beatrice Webb, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain* (London, 1891); idem and Sidney Webb, *The Consumers' Co-operative Movement* (London and New York, 1921).

⁵⁹ G. D. H. Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-stated* (London, 1920), 161-73; cf. David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge, 1997), 162-76; Ben Jackson, *Equality and the British Left* (Manchester and New York, 2007), 60 and *passim*.

⁶⁰ Jackson, *Equality*, 71-2.

⁶¹ Ranga, *Fight*, 109-111.

One evening Mr. Brailsford said that the solution for India's peasant problem might be found ... by cooperatively reorganising the credit, farm supplies and marketing as well as the processing of agricultural products. I told him how I too thought so, on reading about the cooperative movement from ... books by the Webbs ... and also after meeting the leaders of the British Cooperative movement. I had already visited a number of cooperative stores in Wales. I was a regular member of the Oxford Cooperative Store. He said, "but the English movement has concentrated mostly on consumers. It has not succeeded with producers". Then I wondered whether I should go to Denmark, the home of agricultural cooperation. He encouraged that idea ...⁶²

Travelling to Denmark for a week, Ranga says his time there was 'inspiring and satisfying' and he got much out of it. Indeed, Ranga observed how nearly all of the interactions that peasants had with other parts of society were either entirely or partly managed through cooperatives, which were established by the peasants themselves. Thus, small, landed peasants had assumed 'much strength in economic and social spheres' through their cooperatives.⁶³

Ranga's observations were accurate, as Denmark's cooperative movement - starting in 1866 with consumer cooperatives to lower food prices amid declining retail competition - had, by the 1920s, expanded to include producer cooperatives, such as dairy farmers sharing costly tools. Both followed the 1844 Rochdale principles,⁶⁴ not least the principles of open membership, democratic government, among others. By 1888, Denmark's dairy cooperatives dominated the market, followed by pig cooperatives by 1914, after the first cooperative abattoir opened in 1887; the dairy and pig sectors had about 135,000 and 175,000 members respectively. Producer cooperatives united under a Central Cooperative Committee in 1899, founded a Cooperative Bank in 1914, and helped create an influential Agricultural Council with farmers' unions in 1919.⁶⁵

According to Ranga, the root cause of these Danish achievements 'lay in the successful working of their numerous Folk Schools':

In those schools were being trained during the winter course of 2 to 4 months, thousands of peasant youths, boys and girls, for citizenship. Besides religious teaching, education in History

⁶² Ibid., 111.

⁶³ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁴ Brett Fairbairn, 'The Meaning of Rochdale', (Occasional Paper Series #9 4-02, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, 1994), frontmatter.

⁶⁵ Andrew Larkin, 'Denmark's Agricultural Institutions', *Journal of Economic Issues*, 22, 4 (1988), 1127-9.

and Geography, Economies and Political Science, Civic institutions; the practical side of scientific agriculture was provided. The students gained from their collective but [*sic*] purposive hostel life and religious background and teaching just the needed esprit-de-corps, which is so much like what was gained by the youths of the aristocracy through their public schools and universities.⁶⁶

Again, Ranga's recollections are accurate as the Danish cooperative movement originated from the 1840s Folk High School movement, which educated rural youth beyond primary level in Danish language, culture, agriculture, and ultimately cooperative principles.⁶⁷ In fact, Ranga was so impressed by the Danish folk schools that he claims that they 'stimulated my hopes for the future of India's peasants' and therefore he 'formulated ... plans for starting similar schools in India.'⁶⁸

Thus, Ranga, later, launched the Andhra Peasants Institute in 1933, with Gandhi reportedly inaugurating it, to educate Indian peasants and help them 'develop a Socialist outlook on life' by providing them with knowledge of land revenue systems, tenancy laws, livestock and dairy practices, farm size and cooperation, produce marketing, rural debt and reforms, cooperative credit, and rural-urban divides in socio-economic and political life. Furthermore, the texts used to instruct students in Ranga's schools included the Government of India's famine reports, land revenue reports, the debt relief legislation of Punjab (see chapter 1) and other provinces, various works on the cooperative movement in India, the writings of his Oxford supervisor Gilbert Slater, among many others.⁶⁹

Ranga's interest in cooperatives, initially expressed in his 1927 'Agricultural Industries' article, therefore emerged from a colonial milieu, Fabian socialism, and the Danish example, as adapted towards Gandhian ends. This occurred despite Gandhi's own different personal interest in cooperative principles, demonstrated through his communal living experiments at Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm during his South Africa years⁷⁰ and later at Sabarmati *ashram* -

⁶⁶ Ranga, *Fight*, 117-18.

⁶⁷ Larkin, 'Institutions', 1127-8.

⁶⁸ Ranga, *Fight*, 118.

⁶⁹ N. G. Ranga, *Indian Adult Education Movement* (Rajahmundry, 1938), 64-6, 74-6.

⁷⁰ I.e. before his return to India in 1915.

therefore both before and after his romantic rejection of modern, industrial, machine-dependent western civilisation in *Hind Swaraj* (1909).⁷¹

A further important context for the emergence of Ranga's thought in the 1920s, moreover, which came particularly to influence the shape of his first substantial work *Economic Organisation of Indian Villages* (1926-9), is made clear by C. R. Reddy (1880-1951), the then Vice Chancellor of Andhra University, who notes that it was part of a turn towards 'realistic economics' in India at this time, which sought to make economic enquiry more historical and empirical and less theoretically universalist.⁷² Furthermore, there was a demand from nationalist leaders, not least Gandhi, for more research into rural economic conditions in the 1920s,⁷³ following the contributions of the English agricultural sociologist Harold Hart Mann (1872-1961) and Slater,⁷⁴ the latter having been Professor of Economics at Madras University from 1915-22.⁷⁵

Thus, in *Economic Organisation*, perhaps unsurprisingly and despite his interest in the key 'agrarian populist' stance on cooperation, i.e. supporting their use to reduce the dependence of peasant proprietors on money lenders and to support farms worked by them (see chapters 1-2), the demands of academic rigour led Ranga to present a profoundly non-'agrarian populist' vision of rural society in the villages of Guntur.⁷⁶ We can see this most clearly in the very thorough differentiation Ranga undertook of the varying different social classes and their respective roles in the region's economy:

Most of the ryots whose conditions are studied are dependent upon the paddy cultivation. Kammās of these villages are the land-owning people and very few of them are wage-earners in these villages. Panchamas, Vaddes, Upparas, Kammās of Ongole Taluk,⁷⁷ Muhammadans

⁷¹ M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj [Indian Independence]* [1909] (Cambridge, 2009), 29-69; cf. Brown, *Power*, 12-15; idem, *Gandhi*, 42-3; Ramchandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India* (London, 2013), *passim*.

⁷² C.R. Reddy, 'Introduction', in Ranga, *Organisation*, vol. 1, i.

⁷³ M. K. Gandhi, 'The Kisans of Oudh', [1925] *CWMG*, vol. 26, 328-9, https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/cwmg_volume_thumbview/MjY=#page/1/mode/2up (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁷⁴ Harold H. Mann, *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village*, 2 Vols. (London and Bombay, 1917-21); Gilbert Slater, *Some South Indian Villages* (London and New York, 1918).

⁷⁵ Gilbert Slater, *Poverty and the State* (London, 1930), vi.

⁷⁶ Reddy, 'Introduction', i-ii.

⁷⁷ A sub-division of a district.

and other lower caste people are all chiefly wage-earners, though a few have one or two acres of land each.⁷⁸

This passage shows Ranga adopted a complex understanding of rural society, giving equal attention to landed peasant communities and agricultural labourers, who often came from ‘untouchable’ castes. Most notably, Ranga did not use the Hindi word *kisan* to describe peasants at this stage, instead employing *ryot* – which likely reflects Guntur district’s administration under the *ryotwari* system since the 1820s, where small peasants paid land tax directly to the government rather than through a *zamindar* or another intermediary.⁷⁹ Therefore, because most Kammas were small farmers for subsistence, the community mostly paid its revenue under the *ryotwari* system notwithstanding the fact that a *zamindari* had been bestowed among a Kamma family in Guntur during early British rule.⁸⁰ However, the term *ryot* was also used in North India at this time as a general technical term to describe the peasant in the context of the *zamindari* system as late as the 1940s by other ‘agrarian populist’ politicians such as Charan Singh,⁸¹ the subject of chapter 4, and indeed by Sahajanand as we saw in chapter 2.

In any event, politics soon took precedence for Ranga which would result in an essentialised, ‘agrarian populist’ definition of the peasant. After all, *Economic Organisation* had, Ranga recalls, been intended to not just be an academic study but provide a ‘scientific basis’ for a peasant movement.⁸² This becomes especially clear when we acknowledge that the first volume did not paint a particularly romantic picture of Guntur’s rural economy. This can be seen through Ranga’s note that the average landholding in Nidubrolu was 3.75 acres of land when, according to him, 6 acres was the minimum required in order to provide a ‘minimum standard of decency.’⁸³

⁷⁸ Ranga, *Organisation*, vol. 1, 1.

⁷⁹ Frykenberg, *Guntur*, 62ff, 275; cf. Nilmani Mukherjee, *The Ryotwari System in Madras* (Calcutta, 1962), 3-222.

⁸⁰ Benbabaali, ‘Caste’, 1945-6.

⁸¹ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 97.

⁸² Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, 61.

⁸³ Ranga, *Organisation*, vol. 1, 27, 62, 182ff.

Consequently, following the establishment of the Andhra Provincial Ryots' Associations in 1928 by Ranga and his associates, the organisation took it upon itself to campaign for a more scientific agriculture, improved crops, better fertility of land, the consolidation of landholdings, cooperation in agriculture as well as setting up additional organisations to provide relief for the 'immediate economic grievances' of peasants. Also, Ranga's movement attempted to find ways to increase irrigation of the land, provide more land to the landless and organise *panchayats* for villages and forest areas to strengthen local rural government.⁸⁴

Most significantly, however, Ranga was also now starting to look beyond Andhra too. As he later reflected, 'the year 1929 is very significant in India's peasant movement ... [because] I was able to put out the slogan of Kisan Raj for the first time'.⁸⁵ Adopting the language of *kisan raj*, a slogan also used by Gandhi in that year when he called on India's 'nationalist-minded educationists who wish for ... Kisan raj in India to take up the idea' of spinning cloth via the *charkha*,⁸⁶ was useful to Ranga first and foremost because it aided his transition into an all-India party after Ranga joined Congress in 1930.⁸⁷

Before this point, Ranga and his allies, among whom, as Washbrook and Baker argued, included J. Kuppaswami, a very wealthy *ryotwari* landlord who paid over Rs. 8000 per year in land revenue to the administration, had looked to the *zamindar* backed, 'non-Brahmin' Justice Party (1916-44) to favour their factional interest up until this point, although they did not provide clear primary evidence to confirm this.⁸⁸ Despite this, others have made similar, and difficult to verify assertions, that Ranga was appointed by the party as an 'Adviser of the Madras state government on economic affairs' in 1929.⁸⁹ However, these claims find no support in Ranga's autobiography,

⁸⁴ Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, 61.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ M. K. Gandhi, 'Boycott as Popular Education', [1929], *CWMG*, vol. 40, 269, https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/cwmg_volume_thumbview/NDA=#page/1/mode/2up, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁸⁷ Ranga, *Fight*, 355.

⁸⁸ Washbrook, 'Politics', 520-1ns204-5; Baker, *Politics*, 246ff.

⁸⁹ 'Acharya N G Ranga', *Indian Liberals*, <https://indianliberals.in/content/acharya-n-g-ranga-the-farmers-friend-and-swatantra-party-stalwart/>, (Accessed 11/09/25); cf. Ranga, *Handloom*, title page.

which appears to contain just one, unrelated reference to the Justice Party,⁹⁰ or the key works of scholarship on the Justice Party.⁹¹

Nevertheless, the Justice Party had, between 1916 and 1929, sought to challenge the power of Brahmins in the state administration, attracting many Kammas in the process as they held comparatively fewer government posts when compared to Brahmins as recently as 1912,⁹² the latter of whom also tended to supply the leadership of the Congress party in the region.⁹³ By contrast, the language of *kisan raj* offered Ranga the opportunity to build a broader political constituency of peasants for the Andhra Congress through anti-*zamindari* campaigns in the parts of the south where this land revenue system existed, i.e. 27% of its rural areas, lying mostly in the coastal Andhra region. After all, as in Bihar (see chapter 2) and UP (see chapter 4), and by contrast to Punjab, the British had, since the early days of the nineteenth century, generally sought to cultivate relationships with many of the *zamindars* of Madras as important allies for their regime,⁹⁴ despite the widespread existence of the *ryotwari* system in the province. This strategy proved largely successful, with *zamindar* interests finding significant representation within the politically loyalist Justice Party and in the Madras Legislative Council, although these alliances were often pragmatic and evolved over time.⁹⁵

But to understand how Ranga's anti-*zamindari* campaigns became possible, the onset of the Great Depression, which was also fundamental to the political careers of Ram and Sahajanand (see chapters 1 and 2), in Andhra from 1929 cannot be underplayed as falling agricultural prices, particularly of rice, which collapsed by 50% in early 1931, and related turmoil in the credit markets, as like in Punjab (see chapter 1), rural debt was a serious problem in Madras with up to 95% of the rural population owing money and agricultural prices having fallen to such an extent

⁹⁰ Ranga, *Fight*, 169.

⁹¹ Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India* (Berkeley, 1969), ch. 9; cf. P. Rajaraman, *The Justice Party* (Madras, 1988), 176-7, 228.

⁹² Irschick, *Politics*, 13, 176-7, 231-2ff.

⁹³ Ibid., xiv-26; cf. Weiner, *Party Building*, 139-40.

⁹⁴ Baker, *Politics*, 202-3.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 34-5ff, 41, 55 and *passim*.

that credit eventually ceased, a subject that Ranga wrote about in a 1933 pamphlet,⁹⁶ all of which meant that village leaders within the estates of coastal Andhra were unable to maintain control over their villages, which incentivised them towards conflict with the *zamindar* over revenue payments.⁹⁷

In this context, as Ranga recalls, the Andhra Provincial Ryots' Associations was presented with a golden opportunity to make 'the Indian public aware ... that the conditions of peasants in Zamindaris was as bad as the fabled plight of peasants in the Middle Ages'. Thus, a report commissioned by the organisation in 1933, which called for the abolition of the *zamindari* system and involved extensive tours in such estates and interviews with peasants, local leaders, and others, attacked the alleged rent-racking practices of the Raja of Bobbili (1901-78), the dominant figure in Madras politics and the Justice Party after 1930 who became the First Minister of Madras State in 1932, and expressed sympathy for the *ryots* of his estate, among whom an estimated 80% of tenants were said to have been driven into debt to maintain control over their lands during the Depression.⁹⁸

Such findings, alongside an 'agrarian populist' declaration that all peasants should become the owners of these lands,⁹⁹ a principle supported by both Ram and Sahajanand (see chapters 1-2), among many other demands, which flew in the face of Gandhi's consensual approach to *zamindar-kisan* relations (see chapter 2), received a positive reception among tenants who had fallen on hard times to protest against an antiquated land revenue system which even the British, despite their desire to rule in collaboration with *zamindars* as noted above, had attempted to reform previously.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Cited in *ibid.*, 177n18.

⁹⁷ Ranga, *Fight*, 134-5; Baker, *Politics*, 175, 177, 202; Rothermund, *Depression*, 85.

⁹⁸ N. G. Ranga et al., *Economic Conditions of the Zamindari Ryots* (Bezwada, 1933), 10; Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, 63; B. Reddy Prasad Preddy, 'Anti-Zamindari Struggles in Andhra', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Hyderabad, 1993), 118.

⁹⁹ Ranga et al., *Zamindari Ryots*, iv, 1ff.

¹⁰⁰ Baker, *Politics*, 203-5.

Ranga's subsequent anti-*zamindari* campaigns, which involved mass meetings, peasant marches and potential withholding of land revenue through a separate anti-land revenue resettlement campaign, news of which led to Ranga's arrest in 1931,¹⁰¹ and their activities were duly absorbed by Congress. Before long, Ranga was also selected as a Congress candidate for the 1934 Central Legislative Assembly elections, the lower house of the Indian legislature in Delhi as established by the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919,¹⁰² given that, as we saw in chapter 2, after the conclusion of the Civil Disobedience campaigns, Congress had decided to contest elections to British legislatures once again.¹⁰³

In many respects, Ranga's selection was a remarkable achievement that defied the growing caste polarisation of Andhra politics, where Kammas tended to support the Communist Party, the Andhra branch of which was also formed in 1934,¹⁰⁴ and their longstanding rival cultivating caste, the Reddys, who, it has been claimed, were responsible for the relegation of the Kammas from a *kshatriya* to a *shudra* caste all the way back in the fourteenth century,¹⁰⁵ a community which tended to support Congress and now controlled the less prosperous, when compared to Ranga's Guntur district, Rayalaseema region of interior Andhra.¹⁰⁶ This potentially points to the significance of nationalist, and perhaps even 'agrarian populist', ideology in motivating his politics even at this early stage and/or an attempt to work through the caste categories increasingly informing Andhra politics in favour of a 'peasant' based approach.¹⁰⁷ In the long run, this allowed Ranga to secure some level of support from both communities during the nationalist era at least.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 210.

¹⁰² Ghosh, *Terrorists*, 28.

¹⁰³ Brown, *Disobedience*, 381, 384, 389-90.

¹⁰⁴ Mohan Ram, 'The Communist Movement in Andhra Pradesh', in Paul R. Brass and Marcus F. Franda (eds.), *Radical Politics in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 281-321.

¹⁰⁵ K. B. Choudary, *A Brief History of the Kammas* (Sangam Jagarlamudi, 1955), 1-82; cf. Harrison, 'Caste', 382-4.

¹⁰⁶ Benbabaali, 'Caste', 1949-50.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Harrison, 'Caste', 384-5.

¹⁰⁸ Elliot, 'Caste and Faction', 154.

Despite this, however, Ranga's emergence as a Congress leader had not been achieved in straightforward fashion. In his own words, it was the product of a 'herculean struggle' because the 'stalwarts of the Andhra Congress' opposed his candidacy on account of him not having participated in the Non-Cooperation movement in Andhra during the 1920s,¹⁰⁹ among other reasons. However, with the support of the secretary of the Andhra Congress and Gandhi himself, among others, Ranga was selected as a candidate based on a case that his inclusion would be vital to any potential Congress victory in his constituency.¹¹⁰ Thus, Ranga served in the Central Legislative Assembly, c.1935-46.¹¹¹

In terms of the building of Ranga's own career and the extension of his 'agrarian populism' to the adoption of policy positions on land reform, the anti-*zamindari* protests were therefore a clear success for Ranga, which allowed him to attract more followers and allowed him to become an important player within the Andhra Congress Party thereafter.¹¹² Although in this period, on his own account, he shied away from wider factional battles within the Andhra Congress party, the leadership of which was dominated by Brahmins at this time.¹¹³ However, Ranga would not be able to ignore them in the long run as we will see later in section III.

Nonetheless, Ranga's influence in the Andhra Congress can be seen in the run-up to the 1937 elections when he insisted that 'peasants' be given Congress tickets and Congress candidates take a pledge to address their problems. His calls for 'separate Kisan representatives' in addition to the Congress nominees, however, evoked push back from Jawaharlal Nehru on 13 June when the latter said that, *inter alia*, they risked allowing a 'reactionary third party ... [to] profit'.¹¹⁴ In the campaign itself, moreover, Congress used anti-*zamindari* slogans, working in collaboration

¹⁰⁹ Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya, *The Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh*, vol. 3 (Hyderabad, 1965), 3-51.

¹¹⁰ 'Elected to Central Assembly', (1934), N. G. Ranga Papers, NAI, S. No. 1, 1-4, quotes at 4.

¹¹¹ Ranga, *Fight*, 178-85; cf. Reddy, 'Anti-Zamindari Struggles', 160; Baker, *Politics*, 259-65.

¹¹² Baker, *Politics*, 246.

¹¹³ Ranga, *Fight*, 355ff.

¹¹⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru to N. G. Ranga, 13 June 1936 in N. G. Ranga, *Agony and Solace* (Nidubrolu, 1974), 9.

with *zamindari* tenant associations in the coastal Andhra districts where their appeal would be most potent.¹¹⁵

Ranga's efforts therefore made an important contribution to Congress' massive victory in Madras where they won 159 out of 215 seats and eventually removed the Justice Party from power.¹¹⁶ In response, Ranga hailed the increased political consciousness of the peasantry and expressed his optimism that the tenants who had struggled with him during the 1930s would now be able to have their grievances redressed when the Congress ministry in Madras, led by C. Rajagopalachari, was eventually formed in July 1937.¹¹⁷

It should, however, be acknowledged at this stage that Ranga's adoption of the anti-*zamindari* cause, as well as his use of the term *kisan*, were primarily meant to appeal to peasant proprietors from his own Kamma caste community to unify them to join the anti-colonial nationalist movement and to increase their influence within it. As Keiko has convincingly argued, the use of the term *kisan* by Ranga 'concealed class diversity and the delicate position of Kammas amongst Kisans'.¹¹⁸ Indeed, Ranga even appears to have labelled the few Kamma families who had received *zamindar* status in the colonial period, and were still active by the 1920s, as *kisans*.¹¹⁹ To a large extent therefore, Ranga's use of '*kisan raj*' rhetoric seems to have really meant '*Kamma raj*' in practice and was thus a rather limited, identitarian 'populism' in some respects, its inclusive connotations notwithstanding.

Following Ranga's emergence into nationalist politics, his 'agrarian populist' vision, however, developed further in the context of the Lohia-Sundarayya debate, sketched in chapter 2, within the AIKS which was seeking:

[T]he securing of complete freedom from economic exploitation and the achievement of full economic and political power for the peasants and the workers and all other exploited classes.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Reddy, 'Anti-Zamindari Struggles', 160-1.

¹¹⁶ Christopher Baker, 'The Congress at the 1937 Elections in Madras', *MAS*, 10, 4 (1976), 557.

¹¹⁷ Reddy, 'Anti-Zamindari Struggles', 162, 164.

¹¹⁸ Keiko, 'Kammas', 370-1.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.; cf. Benbabaali, 'Caste', 1947-8.

¹²⁰ Quoted in N. G. Ranga, 'The Peasants of India', *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 June 1937.

However, Ranga, like Sahajanand, who had described Ranga as one of his ‘most intimate friends’ c.1940,¹²¹ followed the relatively moderate Lohia-CSP position within the organisation, which sought to make it representative of the interests of a wide range of peasant classes. However, Ranga recognised that Sundarayya and the CPI, who wanted poor peasants to be supported primarily by the AIKS, had a point when he accepted in 1937 that:

One-third of our Kisans are landless ... [and] are exploited most cruelly by their employers, most of whom are ... land-owning and capitalistic-minded Kisans.¹²²

Ranga’s solution to this problem, however, was to insist upon a wider *kisan* identity between the landed and the landless and to encourage them to fight a common struggle against their exploiters outside of rural society, especially:

[T]he present system of capitalism and landlordism and also of the State, dominated by capitalists and landlords.¹²³

On this basis, Ranga endorsed the organisation’s leftist ‘*kisan mazdoor raj*’ slogan which he used in his address to the second AIKS conference in 1936.¹²⁴ This triangulation was, however, not enough to offset criticism from Communists within the organisation who argued that Ranga was neglecting the plight of the agricultural labourer as well as the urban proletariat, especially c.1935/6.¹²⁵ Indeed, Ranga was clashing with Sundarayya over organisational matters related to the operation of his peasant schools by 1938.¹²⁶ It was thus specifically in this context of debate with Communists via the AIKS that Ranga decided to deploy his ‘*kisan mazdoor praja raj*’ slogan to show that he was not just championing peasant proprietors,¹²⁷ and he, on his own account, even started to conduct rural village surveys to document the poverty of poorer *kisans* and call for the establishment of security of tenure and rent reduction.¹²⁸ Using this specific slogan was,

¹²¹ Hauser and Jha, *Culture*, 494.

¹²² N. G. Ranga, *Kisan Speaks* (Madras, 1937), 223.

¹²³ Ibid., 224.

¹²⁴ Rasul, *Kisan Sabha*, 9-10.

¹²⁵ Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, 68.

¹²⁶ P. Sundarayya to N.G. Ranga, 19 March 1938 in Ranga, *Agony*, 14-15.

¹²⁷ Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, 68; cf. Yagati Chinna Rao, ‘Caste and Class in Late Colonial Andhra’, *Studies in People’s History*, 3, 1 (2016), 96.

¹²⁸ Ranga, *Fight*, 208-9.

therefore, useful to Ranga as it helped him distinguish his conception of peasant and worker unity to Communist interpretations, which to Ranga really meant peasant subordination to the industrial proletariat.¹²⁹ Although he would only lend greater theoretical definition to his '*kisan mazdoor praja raj*' ideal at a later stage.

One important figure who helped Ranga do this was the leftist Congress leader Subhas Chandra Bose, who, introduced in chapter 2, had greatly influenced Sahajanand, c.1938-40. While Ranga had engaged with Bose before this point at a Congress meeting in 1931, it was only in conversation with Bose in 1939 prior to the 'anti-compromise conference', (see chapter 2), that the latter's influence came to affect him significantly.¹³⁰ Thus, according to Ranga, Bose argued in conversation with him that '*kisan mazdoor raj*', the AIKS slogan, needed broadening to include workers among Indian youth and the middle-classes who had also made contributions to the anti-colonial struggle and whose participation was vital if future anti-British campaigns were to be a success. Ranga accepted Bose's argument and as a result expanded the '*kisan mazdoor raj*' slogan to include *kalakars*¹³¹ and *bhuddijeevis*.¹³² The full slogan was thus '*Kisan, Kalakar, Mazdoor, Buddhijeevi Raj*' or '*kisan mazdoor praja raj*' for short. Regardless, the *praja*¹³³ part of the slogan was the key part for Ranga and it included '*shramiks*'¹³⁴ of all types.'¹³⁵

Ranga's emphasis on 'democracy' which he later added to the slogan, moreover, came after the AIKS split of 1941-2. Like Sahajanand and many Indian Communists, Ranga was arrested in April 1940 for failure to comply with government restrictions on his liberty following his delivery of anti-war speeches and encouraging *kisans* to take 'direct action' against the British both at the AIKS' Palasa conference of March 1940 and elsewhere.¹³⁶ Thus, he was imprisoned for much of

¹²⁹ Ranga, *Kisans and Communists*, 5; cf. V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* [1917] (Moscow, 1969), 18-26.

¹³⁰ Ranga, *Fight*, 312.

¹³¹ Artisans.

¹³² Intellectuals (or professional workers).

¹³³ People.

¹³⁴ Toilers.

¹³⁵ Ranga, *Fight*, 312-13.

¹³⁶ Ranga, *Fight*, 242-4, 321-4.

the period, c.1940-4 bar a brief period of freedom in 1942 after which he was re-arrested in November 1942 for continuing to spread anti-war propaganda.¹³⁷

During this period, as we saw in chapter 2, the CSP and CPI factions had become estranged regarding the relative influence of the Communists within the organisation.¹³⁸ Ranga was also unimpressed by the CPI's 'Proletarian Path' document of March 1940, which he interpreted as essentially representing a deviation from the AIKS slogan of '*kisan mazdoor raj*' which, he believed, implied equality between workers and peasants in its ideal polity. To Ranga, the CPI now seemed to be advocating a 'an undiluted proletarian path for the achievement of freedom.'¹³⁹

The main factor behind the split, however, was outrage over the CPI's success in changing AIKS policy towards supporting the war effort at the CKC's meeting in Nagpur of 13 February 1942.¹⁴⁰ In response, Ranga and his followers left the AIKS in 1942 to establish a rival Kisan Congress in keeping with the original spirit of the movement and the AIKS became a Communist-led organisation thereafter.¹⁴¹

Although Ranga's suspicions about the Communists went all the way back to the formation of the 'United Front' in 1934, it was especially from this moment on, given that the CPI had succeeded in capturing his organisation and converting many of his followers to their ideology, that Ranga 'soured on them'.¹⁴² Indeed, Ranga had been particularly disturbed by the decision of Sahajanand and Indulal Yajnik, as we saw in chapter 2, to effectively follow the CPI's 'People's War slogan'.¹⁴³ After this episode, Ranga therefore said that he spoke of 'democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*' in order to express his opposition to totalitarianism both of the communist and fascist variety.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ Ibid., 286, 289-90.

¹³⁸ Ranga, *Kisans and Communists*, 9, 15.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, 182.

¹⁴⁰ Ranga, *Fight*, 289-90.

¹⁴¹ Ranga, *Kisans and Communists*, 22.

¹⁴² Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 169.

¹⁴³ Ranga, *Kisans and Communists*, 19.

¹⁴⁴ Ranga, *Fight*, 312-13.

Post AIKS, Ranga attempted to fill this vacuum in his political and intellectual life by moving towards Gandhism. In some respects, this was an odd development because while Ranga had been inspired by Gandhi's economic ideas in the 1920s as we discussed earlier, this had not stopped him from denouncing his first *satyagraha* of 1917 because it did not 'lead up to any fight against the main causes namely the excessive rents and exorbitant incidence of debt [and] ... the ravages of the *zamindari* system'.¹⁴⁵ In 1934, moreover, as Congress' Civil Disobedience campaign wound down, Ranga had also called for a general strike to end colonial rule, albeit one conducted non-violently.¹⁴⁶ Also, Ranga had supported the right of Bihar *kisans* to carry their sticks to use in self-defence in moments of confrontation with *zamindars*, despite the controversy it provoked within the Bihar Congress in 1938 when Sahajanand was accused of inciting violence during the *bakasht* struggles.¹⁴⁷ In the following year, he then attacked Congress for not putting, particularly between 1905-1919 i.e. before Gandhi had taken full control of Congress, 'as much stress on the need for relief for our peasants ... as it did on the needs of our industrialists'.¹⁴⁸ But above all, Ranga had fallen out with Gandhi as recently as March 1940 regarding the calls for 'direct action' against the British which led to his arrest and which Ranga had pursued, in collaboration with the radical Bose, without explicit sanction from Gandhi or Congress.¹⁴⁹

However, by 29 October 1944, Ranga was clearly ready for a rapprochement with Gandhi when, in an interview with the Mahatma following his release from prison earlier that month,¹⁵⁰ he referred to the famous and fascinating AICC resolution of 8 August 1942, introduced by Nehru and supported by Vallabhbhai Patel i.e. Gandhi's most senior followers,¹⁵¹ and was released the very day that Gandhi launched the 'Quit India' movement (see chapter 2), which Ranga later said showed 'Gandhi's faith in peasants ... [and that they] have grown to be the

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (London, 1948), 172-3.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Venkatarangaiya, *Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh*, vol. 4, 105.

¹⁴⁷ Ranga, *Fight*, 282.

¹⁴⁸ Ranga and Sahajanand, *History*, 11.

¹⁴⁹ Ranga, *Fight*, 321.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

¹⁵¹ Guha, *Gandhi*, 671.

principal revolutionary force in India',¹⁵² and most likely the following lines given the following conversation that followed between Ranga and Gandhi:

The A. I. C. C. ... repeats with all emphasis the demand for the withdrawal of the British power from India. On the declaration of India's independence, a provisional government will be formed ... its primary functions must be to defend India ... and to promote the well-being and progress of the workers in the fields and factories and elsewhere, to whom essentially all power and authority must belong.¹⁵³

In Ranga's interpretation, the resolution was therefore saying that the 'power in the national Government and Swaraj India ought to belong to the toilers in the fields, in the factories and elsewhere'. This established the context for Ranga's question of whether 'the Congress stands for the achievement of democratic *Kisan-Mazdoor-Praja Raj*, after the attainment of *Swaraj*?' Gandhi responded in the affirmative: 'the Congress stands for democratic *Kisan-Mazdoor-Praja Raj*',¹⁵⁴ which Ranga says, 'overwhelmed ... and inspired ... [him] with hope'.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, Ranga was also able to claim that he had received Gandhi's 'blessing' for other aspects of his agenda including the principle of peasant proprietorship and the ability of the peasant to 'oblige the State through the exercise of their franchise and political influence ... to improve their individual and collective conditions and minimize the power of the landlords'.¹⁵⁶

By this point, both Ranga and Gandhi could also agree on the need for the abolition of the *zamindari* system. After all, Gandhi had stated earlier in 1944 (see chapter 2), that 'the kisan or the peasant ... is the son of the soil which ... should belong to him, not to the absentee landlord or zamindar',¹⁵⁷ which Ranga quoted in the interview. Even so, Gandhi's agreement with Ranga on this point was contingent on *zamindari* abolition being achieved through 'non-violent means' and

¹⁵² 'All India Kisan Congress ... Presidential Address of Prof N. G. Ranga', (1946), N. G. Ranga Papers, NAI, S. No. 3, 3.

¹⁵³ 'Resolution Passed by the All India Congress Committee', [1942], *CWMG*, vol. 76, 459, https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/cwmg_volume_thumbview/NzY=#page/1/mode/2up (Accessed 11/09/25).

¹⁵⁴ 'Interview to N. G. Ranga', [1944] in *CWMG*, vol. 78, 249, https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/cwmg_volume_thumbview/Nzg=#page/1/mode/2up (Accessed 11/09/25); cf. N. G. Ranga, *Bapu Blesses* (Nidubrolu, 1969), 87.

¹⁵⁵ Ranga, *Fight*, 317-18.

¹⁵⁶ 'Interview to Ranga', 246-7.

¹⁵⁷ Gandhi, 'Hints for Constructive Workers', 219-20.

he made a point of reminding him that he still subscribed to his theory of ‘trusteeship’ and did not ‘want to antagonize the zamindars’ unnecessarily.¹⁵⁸

It is challenging to say exactly what had led Gandhi to change his views on the *zamindari* system, c.1942-4. Although it was clearly connected to the shift in Congress policy towards full independence, which it had sought since 1929, but with *immediate* effect as was called for during the ‘Quit India’ movement.¹⁵⁹ Also, Gandhi had stated in October 1944 that ‘workers should definitely realize that the constructive programme is the non-violent and truthful way of winning *purna swaraj* ... [and] its wholesale fulfilment.’¹⁶⁰

The ‘constructive programme’, to which Gandhi was referring, was his own document of the same named first published in 1941 which, as Gandhi put it in the 1945 edition, would allow his Congress following to ‘build up the nation from the very bottom upward’. Although while the text does call for the development of *khadi* and ‘other village industries’, specifically ‘hand-grinding, hand-pounding, soap-making’, *inter alia*,¹⁶¹ Gandhi does not take a clear stand on *zamindari* abolition in it and thus it seems reasonable to conclude that the support he expressed for it in 1944 was at least in part the product of Ranga’s influence.

Notwithstanding, it is equally true that from this point that Ranga was, himself, also heavily inspired by Gandhi’s ideas, definitely more so than the other way round, which can be seen in another short book published by him in 1945 where he declared *ahimsa* to be one of the ‘five great ideas ... exercising the minds of people over the world.’¹⁶²

However, the strongest sign of the Gandhian influence on Ranga at this time can thus be seen in the latter’s *Gandhian Plan* (1945). This pamphlet was essentially written by Ranga to bestow high praise on Agarwal’s 1944 work of Gandhian economics which also inspired Sahajanand (see chapter 2). Explaining the support of his followers among the ‘artisans and peasants and the

¹⁵⁸ ‘Interview to Ranga’, 246.

¹⁵⁹ Irfan Habib, ‘Mahatma Gandhi and the National Question’, *JS*, 47, 1-2 (2019), 9.

¹⁶⁰ Gandhi, ‘Hints for Constructive Workers’, 219.

¹⁶¹ M. K Gandhi, *Constructive Programme* (Poona, 1945), 1, 5-8.

¹⁶² N. G. Ranga, *Outlines of National Revolutionary Path* (Bombay, 1945), 1.

rural masses ...’ for Agarwal’s proposals, Ranga stated that it ‘alone can give them the maximum of employment’,¹⁶³ thereby elaborating on Gandhi’s case about the importance of addressing rural unemployment through an argument that ‘any sensible Plan must take the fullest use of our abundant ‘labour capital’ and minimize our dependence upon the scarce ‘cash capital’. Also, Ranga argued that any plan for Indian economic development ought to ‘respect the demand’(s) of his supporters, although especially artisans rather than peasants, who willed for the ‘all round development’ of India’s cottage industries through the augmentation of ‘the technique, equipment and organization of these arts and crafts’, *inter alia*, because, to him, they were ‘the real proletariat of India.’¹⁶⁴

However, despite Ranga’s desire to link his economic ideas strongly to Gandhian thinking at this time, his rationale provided in *Gandhian Plan* for the use of cooperatives as a tool of developmental thought are also important as Ranga’s arguments represent an important difference in his ‘agrarian populist’ ideology when compared to Sahajanand’s who, as we saw in chapter 2, envisaged the use of cooperatives in farming itself, among other areas, although he also, nevertheless, like Ranga supported the development of cottage industries. Notwithstanding, Ranga wanted artisans to deploy them in rural industry:

Today our artisans work either in their own houses or in those of master-artisans, but always in groups of five or ten. If they can be helped to organize themselves into co-operative societies and work in co-operative workshops, they can work in groups of not more than twenty-five each. Then they can even take benefit of electric power wherever available ... Already our hand-loom weavers are well on their way towards this achievement and the Gandhian Plan alone assures them of further development ...¹⁶⁵

As context, we note that the use of cooperatives in rural development was also strongly supported by Gandhian economic thinkers by this time,¹⁶⁶ and while Gandhi’s *Constructive Programme* of 1941/5 makes no mention of them, he does appear to have endorsed their use to

¹⁶³ N. G. Ranga, *Gandhian Plan* (Bombay, 1945), 1-2.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁶⁶ Agarwal, *Plan*, 58-60, 71, 91.

facilitate the cooperative farming of cattle in 1942.¹⁶⁷ But in Ranga's developmental scheme, cooperatives were mainly intended to, in the sense advocated by Chhotu Ram, although he was not as strongly influenced by Gandhism when compared to Ranga (see chapter 1), diversify the rural economy by adding more economic opportunities, increase production and thereby improve the living standards within villages.

On the other hand, while Ranga's economic thinking c.1945 was clearly heavily Gandhian in tone and he had also argued in favour of a 'Gandhian conception of democracy' whereby the working masses would 'exercise the fullest power over the State and its society',¹⁶⁸ the basic difference between Ranga's and Gandhi's political thought lay in their attitudes towards the nature of the state. Essentially, Gandhi envisaged a nation of autonomous and economically self-sufficient 'village republics' without a strong state.¹⁶⁹ Such communities were also intended to be highly communal by Gandhi and his followers, such as J. C. Kumarappa (1892-1960), another key Gandhian economic thinker whose *Why the Village Movement* (1936),¹⁷⁰ was written to communicate the work of Gandhi's All India Village Industries Association (AIVIA).

The AIVIA, founded by the former in 1934 and organised thereafter by the latter, was established to promote the use of small-scale manufactures at the village level to reduce unemployment and increase rural prosperity as well as to pursue less obviously economic goals such as improving sanitation facilities, rural diets and reforming village education to promote the Gandhi's vision of a 'true civilisation' characterised by non-violent and communal living first outlined in *Hind Swaraj* (1909). The seriousness with which Gandhi took this initiative, moreover, can be seen in his relocation to one particular village called Sevagram¹⁷¹ in 1936, which was his

¹⁶⁷ M. K. Gandhi, 'Co-operative Cattle Farming', *Harijan*, (1942), 39, <https://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap82.php#:~:text=Collective%20cattle%20farming%20would%20ensure,impossible%20otherwise%20except%20for%20charity>, (Accessed 22/09/25).

¹⁶⁸ Ranga, *Outlines*, 3-5.

¹⁶⁹ Karuna Mantena, 'On Gandhi's Critique of the State', *MIH*, 9, 3 (2012), 552-9.

¹⁷⁰ J. C. Kumarappa, *Why the Village Movement?* [1936] (Wardha, 1945), ii.

¹⁷¹ Now in Maharashtra.

official place of residence until his death in 1948, with most of his personal work centring on it and where he, at least initially, lived with several followers in a single room with mud walls.¹⁷²

While Ranga did use Kumarappa's 1936 text to teach students at his peasant political schools,¹⁷³ his economic thought was clearly of a different category to Gandhi's given he was, like Ram and Sahajanand largely (see chapters 1-2), a great champion of peasant proprietary rights as can be seen in the 1944 Ranga-Gandhi exchanges. Thus, Ranga's ideology, which might be helpfully distinguished from the more utopian communalism of Gandhi via the category of 'agrarian populist' ideology, as expressed through his 'democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*' slogan, consequently stressed the importance of democracy and popular sovereignty which led him to accept the creation of a liberal-democratic Republican nation state.

Following the conclusion of WWII therefore, Ranga contributed towards realising this goal through participation in India's Constituent Assembly (1946-50),¹⁷⁴ which in due course framed India's constitution.¹⁷⁵ Taking up his place, Ranga spoke of his satisfaction on the consensus achieved to implement universal adult suffrage, which he had advocated for since 1925.¹⁷⁶ In 1947, Ranga also called for the right of villagers to protest state laws through *satyagraha*,¹⁷⁷ and advocated utilising the village *panchayat* as an instrument for local democratic governance.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, in 1948, Ranga convened the sub-committee on agriculture in the Government of India's Economic Programme Committee,¹⁷⁹ whose influential report, which became Congress policy in January 1948, called for a profit limit of 5% on venture capital, price controls, and the establishment of public ownership in designated industries in the foreseeable future, *inter*

¹⁷² Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 64-9; cf. Brown, *Gandhi*, 299-303, 318ff; Mark Lindley, J. C. Kumarappa (Mumbai, 2007), ch. 2; Venu Madhav Govindu and Deepak Malghan, *The Web of Freedom* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2016), ch. 6.; Guha, *Gandhi*, 493ff.

¹⁷³ Ranga, *Education*, 76.

¹⁷⁴ Ranga, *Fight*, 345-54.

¹⁷⁵ Rohit De and Ornit Shani, 'Assembling India's Constitution', *Past & Present*, 263, 1 (2024), 205-48.

¹⁷⁶ Ranga, *Fight*, 348.

¹⁷⁷ '1947 - Prof. N. G. Ranga's Constituent Assembly Speech on Jan 20', *Prasar Bharati Archives* (2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USSqOnTpQ9w>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

¹⁷⁸ Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 172.

¹⁷⁹ *Report of the Economic Programme Committee* (Allahabad, 1948), 8.

alia.¹⁸⁰ Its 'agricultural aims', moreover, included, *inter alia*, maximising rural employment opportunities while increasing both farm productivity and resource conservation across all aspects of the agricultural sector, removing profit-driven intermediaries and middlemen who then operated between individual farmers and government authorities, replacing them instead with non-profit organizations like cooperatives that serve farmers' interests without seeking private financial gain. Its overall aim was thus to create direct relationships between agricultural workers and state institutions while ensuring comprehensive job creation in countryside industries and farming communities.¹⁸¹

While this was a leftist, or perhaps even 'agrarian populist' developmental programme, therefore, it was certainly not a Communistic programme which endorsed collectivisation, effectively championed by Sahajanand, albeit to a limited extent, via the AIUKS. In fact, Ranga expressed strong opposition to the Telangana Rebellions, where *panchayats* were used to supervise the forced re-distribution of land,¹⁸² whose leaders he demanded, according to the key rebel leader Sundarayya, 'be hunted down and wiped out by declaring martial law'. Indeed, Ranga later wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel in 1950, the Deputy Prime Minister or 'the Congress leader of fascist terror in India' in Sundarayya's phrase,¹⁸³ who assured him that 'we shall do the best we can' about the situation.¹⁸⁴ After all, Ranga's home district of Guntur was not far from the epicentre of the rebellions in Warangal and Nalgonda districts of Telangana. But despite their spread into coastal Andhra, most Kamma lands 'went unscathed' as Andhra Communist leaders, among whom lay several young Kamma intellectuals such as the future CPI General Secretary Rajeshwar Rao (1914-1994), declared the middling and rich peasants 'neutralised' if they stayed out of the conflict.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Sundarayya says that Ranga, who he describes as coming from 'the

¹⁸⁰ Maria Misra, *Business, Race, and Politics in British India* (Oxford, 1999), 184.

¹⁸¹ *Economic Programme Committee*, 24-5.

¹⁸² Purushotham, *Raj to Republic*, 183.

¹⁸³ Sundarayya, *Telangana*, 121.

¹⁸⁴ 'About Communist Violence in Telangana', in Ranga, *Agony*, 188.

¹⁸⁵ Harrison, 'Caste', 382, 390-1.

liberal, landlord class ... [and as an] anti-communist fire-eater', 'did not dare move out without a police lorry to protect him on his tours in Guntur district', c.1948-51.¹⁸⁶

Therefore, by 1950, Ranga had arrived at a firm 'agrarian populist' vision of the nation of 'democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*', although one that was heavily inflected with Gandhian and socialism, which could now be potentially advanced in full and developed further following the end of British rule.

II: Ranga's Exposition of 'Democratic *Kisan Mazdoor Praja Raj*' and Development Politics in 1950s India

This section reconstructs Ranga's fullest expression of 'democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*' as set out in his key ideological work *Credo of World Peasantry* (1957). The section argues that, in the context of national debates regarding economic development and agricultural uplift, Ranga's 'agrarian populism' moved beyond debates within the 1930s and 1940s Indian left plus Gandhian thought to take on a more strident form that set up a binary between an honourable rural people, that included groups beyond the peasantry, against a bureaucratic elite of economic planning officials and which championed cooperation primarily in 'services' rather than in 'production.'

Ranga began his *Credo of World Peasantry* (1957) with an historical account of the oppression of the peasantry over the *longue durée* of Indian history.¹⁸⁷ As Balasubramanian summarises:

Wrenched from life in a "self-sufficient economy" ... feudalism forced peasants to produce more and more "under duress". Feudal interests extorted the farmer's agricultural surplus and left him/her vulnerable to the year's harvest. With the transition to capitalism and the internationalization of markets, ... middlemen came between producer and consumers. They provided "key services" and confused the peasant, leaving him/her at the margin of subsistence.¹⁸⁸

By contrast to this unsatisfactory present, which left peasants with a rotten deal under modern capitalism, Ranga argued that the onset of a 'democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*' would ultimately lead to the following positive outcomes for India's peasants:

¹⁸⁶ Sundarayya, *Telangana*, 104, 121.

¹⁸⁷ Ranga, *Credo*, 11-43.

¹⁸⁸ Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 174.

[A] government which will equalise the terms of trade and which will achieve ... Industrial and commercial progress ... built, in close relation to and in harmony with the capacities, needs and interests of the basic industries of agriculture and forestry, extraction of minerals and their utilisation. Neither undue hurry in industrial development to the detriment of the well-being of the peasant masses, not undue favouritism and disproportionate remuneration for industrial and commercial and intellectual classes.¹⁸⁹

From this passage, several important features of Ranga's approach to the nature of the peasantry at this time emerge, which broadly flow from the earlier positions adopted in AIKS debates in the 1930s. Most importantly, on the nature of the peasantry itself, Ranga describes a phenomenon of 'agricultural masses', which have a 'oneness' and constitute a single 'independent class.'¹⁹⁰

However, in making this argument, Ranga also continued to recognise that distinctions within the peasantry existed. For instance, Ranga acknowledged the existence of the *khet mazdoor* and that their exploitation was more significant than that of the peasant proprietor. But to Ranga, both *kisans* and *khet mazdoors* formed part of a common 'rural civilisation' that had been 'neglected' during the transition in India to industrial capitalism. Thus, 'the Kisans and Khet Mazdoors form but sections of the over-all class of the exploited agricultural masses.'¹⁹¹

Both groups, to Ranga, therefore, were peasants and had a common interest when compared to groups from outside of their common rural world. The implication of this 'agrarian populist' understanding of the peasantry is that internal peasant differentiations should not be politicised due to their potential to uproot and divide a social group that was fundamentally suffering from a common exploitation, especially by landlords, bankers, industrial capitalists and other urban classes.¹⁹²

Thus, the Marxist-Leninist rich/middle/poor stratification of the peasantry, which declared 'that the real peasant; that is the middle and poor peasants, could be and would be in favour of

¹⁸⁹ Ranga, *Credo*, 435-6.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., i, 1, 343-52.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 436.

¹⁹² Ibid., 133.

socialist reconstruction’, as rendered by Ranga, appears nowhere in his own scheme.¹⁹³ Referring to the leadership of Communist China in the 1950s, Ranga denounced this approach:

They are obliged to give peasants “a new social status and hope” before they can persuade them to come into their type of organised farming’ and also to pursue the Leninist tactic of splitting up peasants into poor, middle and rich peasants and destroy their hegemony by first eliminating rich peasants.¹⁹⁴

Although the real problem with the stratification of the peasantry for Ranga was that it did not allow peasants to be their own masters because it subordinated them to proletarian leadership.¹⁹⁵ Hence Ranga’s decision to explicitly dismiss the Marxist-Leninist foundations underpinning this fundamental Communist political tactic.

By contrast, Ranga conceived of a different relationship between the *kisan* and the *mazdoor*. To achieve this, Ranga now reserved the word *mazdoor* exclusively to refer to the industrial proletariat. What is more, Ranga also stressed that there were instances where the proletariat participated, albeit inadvertently, in the oppression of the peasantry.¹⁹⁶ The source of this, Ranga argued, was the ‘chicanery of industrialists and commercial classes’ who thought of achieving cheap sources of food above all else. His solution therefore was to encourage both the peasantry and the proletariat to struggle against capitalism together in an equal partnership.¹⁹⁷

Once we appreciate these theoretical arguments, it becomes easier to understand why Ranga would never be convinced by Communist schemes of large, top-down re-distribution of land, which were premised on the state collectivising rural land and resources to finance industrial development for the benefit of the property-less proletariat. Ranga’s views on this question first became clear in 1949 in his contributions to the Government of India’s Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee. This Committee, appointed by the then President of India’s Constituent Assembly, Rajendra Prasad, and chaired by J. C. Kumarappa, the in-house economist of

¹⁹³ Ibid., 408.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 378.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 408-9.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 136.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 142.

Gandhi's AIVIA as discussed earlier, lent strong support to the introduction of ceilings on agricultural property, at 'three times the size' of what it defined as an 'economic holding' and, controversially, to the establishment of jointly managed, cooperative farms on land reclaimed by the state, i.e. landholdings deemed to be below a 'basic size' with cooperative farming very much seen as the future model for Indian agricultural production.¹⁹⁸

To understand Kumarappa's somewhat surprising support for this agenda, we note that his master Gandhi made several statements which appear to support the use of cooperative principles in farming itself, for example, his assertion that 'the system of co-operation is far more necessary for agriculturists ... [because] the land belongs to the State; therefore, it yields the largest return when it is worked co-operatively.'¹⁹⁹

In a combative 'note of dissent', however, Ranga accepted land ceilings, albeit with a higher ceiling, but, in strong contrast to Gandhi's views and Kumarappa's recommendations, the latter eventually describing Ranga's 'note' as 'rather academic' given that he had not participated in the extensive fieldwork undertaken by the committee,²⁰⁰ strongly opposed the use of cooperative farms arguing that he supported 'the development of Co-operative organisations among our peasants ... [but was] unable to agree to making the actual cultivation of land a cooperative process through compulsion'.²⁰¹ Therefore, while Ranga was strongly opposed to state-led nationalization and re-organisation of small peasant holdings, that is not to say that he never supported any state-led re-distribution, or use of co-operatives in the rural economy.²⁰²

For Ranga's mature views on these subjects, however, we need to look to another text Ranga published in 1958. In the latter, Ranga argued that the Indian government should settle the landless in experimental cooperative farms on lands owned by government should they wish to

¹⁹⁸ *Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee (C.ARC)* (New Delhi, 1949), 24, 25-9.

¹⁹⁹ M. K. Gandhi in *Harijan*, (1947),

[https://www.mkgandhi.org/voiceoftruth/cooperation.php#:~:text=Under%20the%20collective%20system%20no,not%20meant%20to%20do%20so,\(Accessed 11/09/25\).](https://www.mkgandhi.org/voiceoftruth/cooperation.php#:~:text=Under%20the%20collective%20system%20no,not%20meant%20to%20do%20so,(Accessed%2011/09/25).)

²⁰⁰ *Report of the C.ARC*, 1-2.

²⁰¹ 'Minute of Dissent' in *ibid.*, 192-3.

²⁰² Cf. Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 177.

do so,²⁰³ which in retrospect looks like a concession to Sahajanand's arguments to some degree (see chapter 2). Specifically, the Indian government should therefore 'follow the post-1950 Italian experiment of settling 100,000 families on 700,000 hectares of land obtained from expropriated large estates.'²⁰⁴

Doing so would be possible given that by this time *zamindari* abolition had been, between 1950 and 1954, passed by India's post-colonial state legislators at the provincial level affecting significant changes in the landholding structures of many states including, among others, Assam, Bihar, Orissa, UP and Madras, all of which contained significant *zamindari* areas.²⁰⁵

Even so, Ranga, like Sahajanand in Bihar, was not particularly involved in the actual mechanics of *zamindari* abolition in his home province of Andhra. On the contrary, the main man responsible was Kala Venkata Rao (1900-1959) who, as minister of land revenue, had introduced the Madras Estates (Repeal of the Permanent Settlement and Conversion into Ryotwari) Bill into the Madras Legislative Assembly on 28 November 1947.²⁰⁶ Charan Singh, however, was very much involved in the process of abolishing the system in UP, which we will discuss in detail in chapter 4.

Despite this, Ranga argued for the use of 'service co-operatives'. As Ranga clarified, 'service co-operatives' would exist 'only to aid the production operations carried on individually'. This type of cooperative would therefore allow peasants proper access to credit, fuel, marketing and processing tools, and to facilitate sale of farm produce in the manner first imagined by the 'imperial populist' influenced Chhotu Ram in 1920s-30s Punjab (see chapter 1). Also, Ranga called on the Reserve bank of India for higher levels of agricultural credit, for the government to

²⁰³ N. G. Ranga and P. R. Paruchuri, *The Peasant and Co-operative Farming* (Nidubrolu, 1958), ii.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., iii; cf. Lorenzo M. Belotti, 'An Analysis of the Italian Agrarian Reform', *Land Economics*, 36, 2 (1960), 118-128.

²⁰⁵ *Agricultural Legislation in India*, vol. 4 (New Delhi, 1953), vii, 3-24 and *passim*.

²⁰⁶ B. Sarveswara Rao, *The Economic and Social Effects of Zamindari Abolition in Andhra* (New Delhi, 1963), 28.

establish more cooperative warehouses, to stabilise prices and wages and to introduce national insurance against 'natural calamities such as floods, droughts, ... etc.'²⁰⁷

The broader logic that came to underpin Ranga's position was that there was insufficient evidence that establishing cooperation in farming itself, or other new methods, led to higher production rates than the existing methods of individual peasant proprietorship and the family-based model of farming, ultimately supported by Ram and Sahajanand too (see chapters 1-2).

Deploying the language of 'peasant family' economy, Ranga argued that it was the:

[P]rimary indivisible cooperative unit of labour mobilisation, utilisation, discipline and its organisation; it is non-exploitative and self-reliant; it demands the least overheard supervisory charges, and it is free from the maladies of industrial and commercial undertakings.²⁰⁸

Indeed, as Ranga elaborated in a further pamphlet of 1959, 'peasant family economy' ensured:

[S]ocial security for the children, the aged, ... [and] the under-employed dependents in the least expensive and most affectionate manner ... [plus] the most efficient means of producing more per acre.²⁰⁹

Cooperative farming, by contrast, would pave the way for collectivisation, a process which was 'born out of violence' due to the forced expropriation necessary to achieve it.²¹⁰ On this point, Ranga also cited his contemporary 'agrarian populist' dissident Charan Singh, to argue, in defiance of Sahajanand somewhat as his views on cooperative farms were complex (see chapter 2), that it was not realistic to expect peasant proprietors to voluntarily pool their land with strangers beyond their own families.²¹¹

Quoting Mao Zedong, Ranga also argued that the use of cooperatives as a precursor for the introduction of collective farming was implicit in Communist strategy and policy since Lenin notwithstanding the fact that the latter, although he appears to have supported the use of cooperative farming in the long run, from 1921-24, introduced and presided over the New

²⁰⁷ Ranga and Paruchuri, *Co-operative Farming*, vi, 15.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., iv.

²⁰⁹ N. G. Ranga, *Storm Bursts on the Peasantry* (Nidubrolu, 1959), 20.

²¹⁰ N. G. Ranga, *Panchayat Landlordism Versus Peasant Economy* (New Delhi, 1958), 8-9.

²¹¹ Charan Singh, *Whither Co-operative Farming?* (Allahabad, 1956) cited in Ranga and Paruchuri, *Co-operative Farming*, 128n1.

Economic Policy, which was relatively friendly to agricultural markets.²¹² This reinforced Ranga's position, which he argued for earlier in 1949, that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) could not be a genuine peasant party despite its nominal commitment to a 'Workers and Peasants Raj'.²¹³

Overall, Ranga's position on the issue of cooperative farming, as noted by a perceptive, contemporary reviewer of *The Peasant and Co-operative Farming* (1958), was therefore 'dominated more by socio-political considerations, rather than by economic ones'.²¹⁴ The same cannot be said for Charan Singh, who developed the economic angle more convincingly (see chapter 4).

Ranga's arguments were nevertheless highly relevant to the politics of the period. While the ARC's endorsement of cooperative farming in 1949 that led to no enforceable target for such institutions to be established in India's first Five-Year Plan (1951-6), produced by India's Planning Commission (1950-2014) with Nehru its foremost supporter and first chairman,²¹⁵ by the mid-1950s, Congress was seriously looking at the Chinese example as a model for rural development and reform.

In 1955, the Planning Commission, which had heard of extraordinary agricultural growth in China, was actively engaging with Chinese officials and two reports were produced. The first, published in 1956, had concluded confidently that Chinese cooperatives were 'at present working successfully and, organisationally, conditions have been credited for rapid progress in agriculture in the coming years'.²¹⁶ The second, published in 1957, stated that in the cooperative farms 'visited by us, the area pooled by members ranged between 60 to 6000 acres ... [and] out of 19 societies, 18 had registered an increase in their overall production as well as yield per unit'.²¹⁷

²¹² Ranga and Paruchuri, *Co-operative Farming*, 22; cf. V. I. Lenin, 'The Tax in Kind' in idem, *CW*, vol. 32 (1965), 329-65; idem, 'On Cooperation', in *CW*, vol. 33, 467-75; Alan M. Ball, *Russia's Last Capitalists* (Berkeley, 1987), Part I.

²¹³ Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, 108.

²¹⁴ S. K. Goyal, 'Review', *Indian Economic Review*, 4, 2 (1958), 103-04.

²¹⁵ A. H. Hanson, *The Process of Planning* (London, 1966), 89-122; Frankel, *Political Economy*, 84-5, 100-1ff; Vivek Chibber, *Locked in Place* (Princeton, 2003), 144, 149, 153, 176ff.

²¹⁶ *Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agricultural Planning & Techniques*, 190.

²¹⁷ *Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agrarian Cooperatives* (New Delhi, 1957), 175.

As a result, a recommendation for a target of 10, 000 cooperative farms made and subsequently inserted into India's Second Plan (1956-61),²¹⁸ which famously was intended to lead to the establishment of a:

[S]ocialist pattern of society, where the principle means of production are under social ownership control, production is progressively speeded up and there is equitable distribution of the national wealth.²¹⁹

After getting P.C. Mahalanobis (1893-1972),²²⁰ head of India's Planning Commission, on side, Nehru convinced his Food Minister A. P. Jain (1902-1977) to draw up a thorough outline for establishing cooperatives. Gulzarilal Nanda (1898-1998), Congress President, then announced in early-1957 that land reform in India would culminate in 'co-operative village management'.²²¹

This radical shift in policy was also reinforced by Congress' sense of rivalry with the CPI at this time. For example, Namboodiripad (see chapter 2), was calling for the introduction of land ceilings, the distribution of land to poorer peasants and the introduction of democratically organised cooperative farms.²²² After his appointment as Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957, his government quickly moved towards enacting its own agrarian reforms, namely distributing land and providing security of tenure to peasants.²²³ But despite this, once in office, Namboodiripad came to merely support 'service co-operatives which would supply seeds, manure, implements, etcetera, ... in the State' with 'joint farming co-operatives' judged 'not feasible at present'.²²⁴

Namboodiripad's views, in practice, were therefore not that far from Ranga's and Congress was clearly trying to outflank Namboodiripad given that the AICC subsequently endorsed Nehru's view that to starve off further political challenge all parties, Congress included, would need to move further towards the left, especially in economic policy.²²⁵

²¹⁸ Ibid., 186; cf. Hanson, *Planning*, 123-70; Sukhamoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning* (Oxford, 1987), 7-18.

²¹⁹ 'Draft Resolutions for the Avadi Conference', in Sarvepalli Gopal et al. (eds.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, vol. 27 (New Delhi, 2000), 255.

²²⁰ Bayly, 'Ends of Liberalism', 618-21.

²²¹ Quoted in Siegel, *Hungry Nation*, 171.

²²² E. M. S. Namboodiripad, *Agrarian Reforms* (New Delhi, 1956), 12.

²²³ T. J. Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala* (London, 1982), 149-53.

²²⁴ 'Farming Cooperatives Not Feasible', *National Herald*, 17 September 1957.

²²⁵ Frankel, *Political Economy*, 157-8.

Ranga's reconfiguration of the *kisan-mazdoor* relationship, and concrete policy proposals regarding the cooperativisation of Indian agriculture, were thus developed as Indian agricultural policy appeared to be going in a radically leftist direction. This context facilitated Ranga's 'agrarian populism' to become its most explicit yet as Ranga, who had been admittedly highly critical of the First Plan for its 'anti-peasant bias' and lack of guarantees that it would protect the property of the small peasants also championed by Ram and Sahajanand (see chapters 1-2),²²⁶ now in a pamphlet on the Second Plan asserted firmly that agricultural incomes were not rising in proportion to national income, inequality was increasing between urban and rural areas and that the financial burden of the plan was disproportionately affecting agricultural incomes.²²⁷

In line with a generally anti-industrial stance, Ranga proposed income ceilings on urban 'upper-middle classes', 'richer classes' and 'higher progressive classes' to relieve the peasantry from the burden because the Plan as it stood would lead, Ranga concluded, not to 'socialism' but 'only to the exploitation of a new type, by the 'New Class' of bureaucrats and privileged class'.²²⁸

Moreover, the Second Plan also precipitated Ranga to think more broadly about the nature of the Indian 'people'. In a polemical pamphlet of 1959, Ranga championed the interests of the 'self-employed people's sector' by whom he meant 'peasants, artisans, shopkeepers and retail traders' which would be supported by a sector of service cooperatives.²²⁹ In so doing, Ranga argued that India's Planning Commission had insulted India's self-employed people by treating them as if they were exploitative private sector employers:

[I]t may be mentioned that this system strengthens the democratic moorings of a planned society. It reduces to the minimum economic exploitation; Decentralisation of Industry which is so much appreciated in our country is inherent in this system of Self-employment ... But the regrettable fact is that there is not even a trace of appreciation on the part of our planners of this great contribution of the Self-employed people to the maintenance and development of our social economy.²³⁰

²²⁶ Ranga, *Fight*, 416.

²²⁷ N. G. Ranga and P. R. Paruchuri, *The Plan and the Peasant* (Nidubrolu, 1956), 8-11, 12-14, 20-22.

²²⁸ Ranga and Paruchuri, *Co-operative Farming*, 150; cf. Milovan Djilas, *The New Class* (New York, 1957), 37-69.

²²⁹ N. G. Ranga, *Self-Employed Sector* (Nidubrolu, 1959), 2, 14; Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 177.

²³⁰ Ranga, *Self-Employed Sector*, 6-7.

Therefore, by the late 1950s, Ranga's 'agrarian populism' had developed to a more advanced stage as by this point it was not solely framed around championing the interests of peasants but a wider notion of a rural 'people' and his views regarding cooperatives had become finalised and more coherent.

III: 'Agrarian Populist' Theory and Conservative Practice? 'Democratic *Kisan Mazdoor Praja Raj*' in Action, c.1951-64

This section examines how Ranga's political action was informed by the theoretical arguments that he had made hitherto for 'democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*'. The section argues that while Ranga's 'agrarian populism' did result in an alliance with 'conservative'-style forces in Indian politics, this represents a historically specific 'morphological' convergence of his 'agrarian populism' with some 'conservative' ideas rather than a constitutive relationship between the two doctrines.

Ranga's first attempt to enact his vision of 'democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*' was through establishing and leading his own party, the Krishikar Lok Party²³¹ (KLP) from 1951-55, perhaps the first, or at the very least *one of the first*, 'agrarian populist' parties in post-colonial Indian politics.²³² To understand the origins of the KLP, we must look to Ranga's loss of power within the Andhra Congress.

Following the end of WWII, Ranga's ally Tanguturi Prakasam (1872-1957), a Niyogi Brahman lawyer from Guntur district,²³³ was appointed as the Chief Minister of Madras State.²³⁴ But Prakasam had only managed to become Chief Minister due to support from Tamil members of the Madras legislative assembly, who were mainly from non-Brahmin castes, which was motivated out of a desire to stop the Tamil Brahmin leader C. Rajagopalachari becoming the premier of the state.²³⁵

²³¹ Agricultural People's Party.

²³² Cf. Mehta and Singh, 'Populism', 604.

²³³ Stoddart, 'Andhra', in Low, *Congress*, 113.

²³⁴ Myron Weiner, *Party Politics in India* (Princeton, 1957), 91.

²³⁵ Harrison, 'Caste', 394.

Having secured Prakasam's appointment, this group ejected him from power by teaming up with the Andhra followers of Pattabhi Sitaramayya (1880-1959), Prakasam's main rival within the Andhra Congress, whose followers had a firm grip on the party organisation,²³⁶ and Malayalam-speaking MLAs to remove Prakasam from power.²³⁷ The road was thus clear for the non-Brahmin Tamils, led by K. Kamaraj (1903-1975), to replace Prakasam with O. P. Reddiyar (1895-1970) as Chief Minister.²³⁸

To fight back against his depleting influence, Prakasam responded by working with Ranga to seize control of the Andhra Congress organisation from Sitaramayya's faction. Thus, Ranga was elected as Andhra Congress president after defeating Sanjiva Reddy (1913-1996), an ally of Sitaramayya, in 1946.²³⁹

However, when Ranga stood for re-election five years later, he was defeated by Reddy in a close contest, which Ranga attributed to the imposition of an injunction which prevented the participation of twenty-six delegates. Consequently, Ranga and Prakasam resigned from Congress, taking 50 members of the Andhra Congress Committee with them, to set up their own party called the Praja Party²⁴⁰ (PP).²⁴¹ Hence Ranga's letter to Prime Minister Nehru on 19 May 1951, to express his dismay at factional disunity within the Andhra party, and national Congress more broadly, which risked destabilising efforts to improve the living standard of the Indian people and enact his 'democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*' ideals.²⁴²

Differences, however, quickly emerged between Prakasam and Ranga. The main point of contention between the two men was that Ranga wanted the PP to be independent of the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP),²⁴³ a party which had emerged out of the Congress Democratic Front in 1951 as founded by J. B. Kripalani (1888-1982), a 'Gandhian socialist' who had recently

²³⁶ Ibid., 388.

²³⁷ Ibid., 394; Weiner, *Politics*, 91.

²³⁸ P. Kandaswamy, *The Political Career of K. Kamaraj* (New Delhi, 2001), 49.

²³⁹ Harrison, 'Caste', 394; Ranga, *Fight*, 356.

²⁴⁰ People's Party.

²⁴¹ Weiner, *Politics*, 91-2.

²⁴² N. G. Ranga to Jawaharlal Nehru, 19 May 1951 in *Why Ranga Resigns?* (Nidubrolu, 1959), 2.

²⁴³ Peasant's and Working People's Party.

fallen out of favour within Congress and with whom Prakasam had broadly collaborated with since November of that year. Ranga, by contrast, wanted the PP to select its own candidates for election to the state and central legislatures, which Prakasam did not support. The KLP, comprising Ranga's following among the Kammas and focusing mainly on the Andhra region, was therefore born. Speaking at a press conference, Ranga declared that unlike the KMPP, whose leadership was drawn from the urban middle class, the KLP's leadership would have rural origins, and provincial branches would be autonomous in contrast to the rival party's centralised command structure. The two parties therefore departed on matters of organisation and leadership rather than ideology. After all, the KMPP at its founding conference in June 1951 - a party sharing the very same name Ranga had given to his own ideology - had called for increased production, support for cottage and decentralised industries, and equitable distribution of national wealth.²⁴⁴

This ideological compatibility, furthermore, can be clearly observed at a KLP meeting in 1954, when Ranga confirmed his commitment to 'achieve K. M. P. Raj by helping our *Kisan* and *Kalakar* masses to regain their lost pre-eminence in social democracy'.²⁴⁵ Specifically, this led Ranga to argue for:

[D]evelopment of the irrigation, flood control, river and sea conservancy, ... soil conservancy and developments, processing storage, communication and easy and cheap credit facilities, supplies of organic and chemical manures, better cattle, cattle breeding, feeding and protection facilities ... [because] the most urgent need of our agriculture and associate activities ... [which] will stand us in good stead by the time we achieve social justice.²⁴⁶

Unfortunately, however, the political context of the 1950s was not conducive for new parties seeking to promote policy programmes such as these. Thus, politicians like Ranga who wanted to challenge Congress at the 1951-2 elections were disappointed by the results showing that Congress had won a huge majority, namely 362 seats, in the Lok Sabha.²⁴⁷ By contrast, the KLP

²⁴⁴ Weiner, *Politics*, 65-74, 92-3; Harrison, 'Caste', 394.

²⁴⁵ *Krishikar Lok's Aims and Objects* (Tenali, 1954), 2.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁴⁷ Weiner, *Party Politics*, 65; Richard Leonard Park, 'Indian Election Results', *Far Eastern Survey*, 21, 7 (1952), 65. The Lok Sabha (House of the People) is the lower house of the Indian legislature.

won just one seat.²⁴⁸ But Ranga did manage to secure a seat in the Rajya Sabha,²⁴⁹ the upper house of the Indian Parliament.²⁵⁰ Also, the KLP did better in the elections to the Madras Legislative Assembly of that year, which allowed the party to secure the abolition of controls on food in Madras, introduced as an emergency measure during WWII and were re-introduced by the Government of India after a series of fiascos following an attempt to remove them in 1948 which included soaring prices and hoarding,²⁵¹ which Ranga had advocated for at least since the publication of a detailed 1948 pamphlet on the subject, indeed, his pamphlet had essentially cast controls as a scam to benefit, among others, ‘the urban folk, who want to be assured of their rationed supplies at less than cost prices’,²⁵² by lending its support to the government of C. Rajagopalachari (1952-4).²⁵³

Nevertheless, Ranga’s party never made much headway electorally speaking. One reason for this is that it was simply too early for an independent agrarian party to take off, as the Congress was simply then too dominant. Charan Singh’s ‘agrarian populist’ parties, moreover, fared much better after Congress hegemony was strongly challenged at the 1967 elections (see chapter 4).

Regardless, the KLP’s relatively modest political impact is revealed by Ranga’s swift return to working with Congress. The occasion was the collapse of the Congress ministry in Andhra in 1955 following political disagreement regarding the new capital of the state, which had become India’s first linguistic province in 1953,²⁵⁴ and the subsequent calling of fresh elections in 1955 to break the deadlock.

The Congress hierarchy were determined not to let the CPI capitalise on Congress disunity, which was a key reason for the party’s poor performance in the Telugu areas of Madras State at the previous elections, where the Andhra CPI had narrowly emerged as the largest party in

²⁴⁸ ‘Krishikar Lok Party’, *IndiaVotes*, <https://www.indiavotes.com/party/info/19/1/14> (Accessed 11/09/25).

²⁴⁹ Council of States.

²⁵⁰ *Who’s Who, 1952* (New Delhi, 1953), iii.

²⁵¹ Siegel, *Hungry Nation*, 119-30.

²⁵² N.G. Ranga, *Food Controls vs Peasants* [1948] (Nidubrolu, 2001), 1-3.

²⁵³ Sadhna Sharma, *State Politics in India* (New Delhi, 1995), 61.

²⁵⁴ Mitchell, *Language*, ch. 6.

Andhra.²⁵⁵ To prevent this from reoccurring, Nehru personally beseeched non-communist politicians to work together and sent S. K. Patil (1898-1981), a veteran anti-communist from the Bombay Congress, to ensure compliance. From these negotiations, Ranga was approved to nominate candidates in 38 constituencies which allowed Congress to ensure a sole Kamma candidate was selected in each Kamma locale to represent the party. Ranga then quickly got to work and, according to reports in the *Ambala Tribune*, ‘carried the fight against communism into villages hitherto regarded as impregnable Communist fortresses’. This Ranga-Congress ‘United Front’ alliance managed to attract support chiefly by appealing to the propertied Kamma castes, Ranga’s community, by promising support for agricultural prices. After the elections, M. Basavapunnaiah (1914-1992), leader of the Kamma Communists, would concede that Ranga’s support among these Kammas had won Congress the election.²⁵⁶

Ranga, meanwhile, remained deferential, writing personally on 7 March 1955 to Nehru to thank him for his support in forming the United Front ‘which has saved our democracy from the threat of the Communist Party’.²⁵⁷ Following the elections, two KLP members were appointed as ministers as a reward for the party’s contribution to the electoral victory.²⁵⁸ Ranga then announced that the KLP would re-join the Congress. This alliance, however, was one clearly of short-term expediency rather than ideological compatibility given that it was not long after it that Ranga would find himself deeply disillusioned with Congress once again. Not least because his re-entry into Congress was not aided by the fact that despite being promised he would be elected President of the Andhra Congress party, working under the new Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Bezawada Gopal Reddy (1907-1997), his old foe Sanjiva Reddy and his allies successfully defeated Ranga at the subsequent elections for the Presidentship by painting Ranga as a Kamma casteist.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ Ram, ‘Communist Movement’, 301.

²⁵⁶ Harrison, ‘Caste’, 399, 401.

²⁵⁷ ‘Letter to Shri Jawaharlal Nehru from Prof. N. G. Ranga on 7th March, 1955’, in *Why Ranga Resigns?* 29.

²⁵⁸ Ranga, *Fight*, 496.

²⁵⁹ Harrison, ‘Caste’, 403.

Furthermore, despite Ranga's selection as Congress candidate for Tenali for the 1957 General Elections at which Ranga was successfully elected as an MP, he was nevertheless unhappy that only one other candidate from the KLP portion of the United Front had been elected as a parliamentary candidate alongside him.²⁶⁰

But while these issues were important, most significant of all was the fact that Ranga was becoming increasingly disturbed by the prospect of Congress introducing cooperative farming in India which he considered to be an unworkable Communist policy and had earlier expressed strong opposition to, as we saw earlier. Thus, at a celebration following his electoral triumph, Ranga could not help himself from warning his jubilant supporters of the Planning Commission's proposals, which he said formed a dark cloud during his first two years of service.²⁶¹ In 1959, Ranga's second break with Congress was then confirmed when the Congress Working Committee convened at Nagpur to announce its 'Resolution on Agrarian Organizational Pattern.'

At the core of the 'Nagpur Resolution' were proposals to establish ceilings on land ownership by the year's end. The surplus land would then be distributed not to individual proprietors but to village *panchayats*. The *panchayats* would supervise labourers working in collaboration on shared land in a scheme of 'joint co-operative farming.'²⁶²

In reaction, Ranga resigned from Congress to join the newly formed Swatantra Party.²⁶³ Writing to Nehru, he wrote that he had 'found it impossible to agree with your insistence upon the implementation of the Nagpur resolution, especially in relation to co-operative farming.'²⁶⁴ His resignation was quickly bolstered by some ex-KLP members, who had left the United Congress Front to set up their own party, the Democratic Party, after they were not included in the cabinet of Andhra Pradesh after 1955 and then participated in the Socialist Democratic Party

²⁶⁰ Ranga, *Fight*, 508ff.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 514ff.

²⁶² *Co-operative Farming* (Bombay, 1959), 3-4.

²⁶³ 'New Party's Leader', *TI*, 12 June 1959.

²⁶⁴ N. G. Ranga to Jawaharlal Nehru, 4 June 1959 in Ranga, *Agony*, 367.

(SDP) led by P. V. G. Raju (1924-1995), resigned from the SDP to join Swatantra to once again link up with their former boss.²⁶⁵

The importance of Ranga's following within the Swatantra Party, moreover, is reflected in that he was nominated as Swatantra's leader at the party's founding meeting on 4 June in Madras before later becoming party President.²⁶⁶ Afterwards, Ranga denounced Congress for seeking to impose 'the commune-oriented Chinese system of agrarian economy' which would subject villagers to 'wage slavery'.²⁶⁷

Ranga's entry into Swatantra was also aided by Rajagopalachari, the founder of Indian 'conservatism', who had lampooned the Indian economy as a 'permit and licence *rāj*' which was commanded from above by overly powerful bureaucrats, big business and Congress politicians.²⁶⁸ This cohered with Ranga's 'agrarian populist' focus on a corrupt and out-of-touch urban based elite. As a result, his 'agrarian populism' started to interact with 'conservative' ideology.

To develop this comparison, however, we need to define 'conservatism'. I therefore introduce Freedman's definition of 'conservatism' in line with his 'morphological' understanding of political ideologies.²⁶⁹ On conservatism specifically, Freedman underlines three 'core' ideas: an insistence that change must be 'gradual and organic', that social order has 'extra-human origins' and a certain 'mirror-image' quality whereby it emerges in response to perceived threats to existing societies.²⁷⁰

If this definition is used, Ranga did deploy some 'conservative' ideas after joining Swatantra, although they could also be interpreted as being 'adjacent' to 'agrarian populism' in general given their similar deployment by Ram and Sahajanand, figures who did not work with 'conservative'

²⁶⁵ Sharma, *Politics*, 63.

²⁶⁶ C. Rajagopalachari, *Birth of Swatantra Party* (Bangalore, 1959), 4; Erdman, *Swatantra*, 41.

²⁶⁷ Ranga, *Storm*, 15.

²⁶⁸ Balasubramanian, *Economy*, ch. 3.

²⁶⁹ Freedman, *Ideologies*, 75-91.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 332-346.

parties in the way that Ranga came to do (see chapters 1-2). While Nehru had insisted that cooperation in agriculture would be voluntary and property rights would be respected,²⁷¹ Ranga framed cooperative farming as a threat which would result in the establishment of Sino-Soviet collective farming, which gave his thought a highly pronounced ‘mirror-image’ quality.

However, the most striking example of Ranga using a ‘conservative’ idea can be seen in his description of the party as ‘a national front for the protection of our national *Dharma*’, which reflects a desire to regulate the pace of rural economic change and appeals to a traditional Hindu concept regarding the extra-human origins of society.²⁷² As Ranga declared to those gathered at the first party convention of the Party in Bombay on 1 August 1959:

In India ... the conception and practice of Dharm[a] were [*sic*] evolved through several centuries ... According to that Dharma, the rights and privileges of internal autonomy in ... social and economic matters of self-governing Guilds of craftsmen and professionals and panchayats of peasants and villagers were fully assured and respected and peasant proprietorship and craftsmen[’s] economic freedom were accepted as ... the fabric of our social economy ... All freedom [*sic*] people have been obliged to face upto [*sic*] this challenge and fight for the Swatantra of the Indian conception embracing the human rights and freedom and independence of people, as individuals and members of concentric circles of self-governing groups and associations ... This is the role that the Swatantra Party has now taken up ...²⁷³

Indeed, Ranga followed this rhetorical flourish with an attack on ‘the Soviet approach of our planners’, given that India’s first two plans, c.1951-61, was strongly focused on the development of heavy industry on account of Nehru’s admiration for the Soviet model,²⁷⁴ although his regime was rather friendly to capital in practice so it is important not to uncritically accept the ‘myth of socialism’ in Nehruvian India,²⁷⁵ heavily implying that a ‘Gandhian plan’ would be preferable as an alternative.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ Zachariah, *Nehru*, 226-7.

²⁷² Ranga, *Fight*, 538.

²⁷³ ‘Speech by Prof. N.G. Ranga at the First Convention of the Swatantra Party ...’, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, Inst. I, I, S. No. 28, 183-4.

²⁷⁴ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru* (Bombay, 1976), 106-9; cf. Chatterjee, *Thought*, 144-6ff; Ajit Singh, ‘The State and Industrialization in India’, in Ha-Joon Chang and Robert Rowthorn (eds.), *The Role of the State in Economic Change* (Oxford, 1995), 171-2ff; Tirthankar Roy, *A Business History of India* (Cambridge, 2018), 153-202.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Taylor C. Sherman, *Nehru’s India* (Princeton, 2023), 85-117.

²⁷⁶ ‘Speech by ... Ranga’, 184.

This point became explicit, moreover, when Ranga, discussing Swatantra's economic policy during debates about the Third Plan (1961-66),²⁷⁷ linked Gandhian economic thought to the language of *dharma* when he stated that 'our plan is a Gandhian plan ... that has for its foundation *Dharma*'.²⁷⁸ In specific terms, Ranga meant a developmental strategy that prioritised 'agriculture, cottage industries and organised small-scale industries producing consumer goods' which made 'life happy for people with a low income'.²⁷⁹ He also, almost certainly, would have agreed with the party's stance on cooperatives, remarkably expressed in terms of peasant vs bureaucrat language in line with Ranga's 'agrarian populist' approach notwithstanding the fact that 'conservative' ideologues tend to support hierarchy and do not generally see society as being divided into just two blocs,²⁸⁰ given that its key initial policy statement of 1960 declared that Swatantra 'believes in consumer cooperative societies, cooperative banks, industrial cooperatives and multipurpose cooperatives for the agriculturists' and not cooperative farms because:

Once the agriculturist loses his individual ownership, possession and utilisation of his farm, the free and self-respecting peasantry which is the bulwark of democracy will have gone and bureaucrats will have acquired a stranglehold on the economic, social and political life of the rural area.²⁸¹

To understand what Ranga meant by *dharma*, however, we first need to define it through an explanation of the *dharmashastras*. In essence, they are a collection of Sanskrit texts which represent a Hindu school of jurisprudence, and which the *Manusmriti*, cited by the 'agrarian populist' figures of Ram and Sahajanand (see chapters 1-2), forms a part of. They conceive of law by generally defining *dharma* as 'the privileges, duties and obligations of a man, his standard of conduct as a member of the Aryan community, as a member of one of the castes, in a particular stage of life'.²⁸² *Dharma*, therefore, concerns the social practices and obligations people

²⁷⁷ 'India's Third-Year Plan', *Economic Digest*, 3, 3 (1960), 73-76; cf. Hanson, *Planning*, 171-234; Frankel, *Political Economy*, 180ff.

²⁷⁸ Quoted in Erdman, *Swatantra*, 196.

²⁷⁹ *Swatantra Alternative to Third Plan* (Bombay, 1964), 23.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Freedman, *Ideologies*, chs. 9-10.

²⁸¹ *To Prosperity Through Freedom* (Bombay, 1960), 17.

²⁸² Donald R. Davis Jr., *The Spirit of Hindu Law* (Cambridge, 2016), 1, 15-16.

had to one another, including in small-scale village settings, on account of their caste and family identity.

Indeed, this was the sense in which Ranga understood the term, which can be seen strikingly in his exploration of life in the village commonwealths of ancient India in *Credo of World Peasantry* which Ranga wrote about after encountering evidence from ancient archaeological inscriptions.²⁸³ In this context, Ranga argued that a commitment to *dharmā* was the key ideal underpinning the political and social life of ancient India. The state was thus a ‘monarchical order ... tempered by an administrators’ council and ... consultative assembly, and the rule of law as indicated in the *Dharma Shastras*.²⁸⁴

The State contented itself with exercising the lightest possible coercive authority over these villages. Towns were similarly autonomous. It was indeed a pluralistic society and political and economic power were decentralised to the greatest extent and social life was conducted according to certain well understood social maxims (known as the Dharma) that respected people’s mutual obligations and individual rights. Village Commonwealths as well as craft guilds were administered in a democratic manner; all adults having the right to vote and the village and guild panchayat organising political, economic and social life of their respective members.²⁸⁵

A rich quality of life was thereby created:

Displays of dancing, painting, acrobatics, including the ballet performances, singing, theatricals, pantomimes, mimicries, historical exhibitions, public recitals of ballads, stories of heroes, gymnasiums, and Olympic tournaments used to be provided at intervals to create a sense of nice variety of social life. All such services were paid for only to a reasonable extent and their votaries going from village to village in their settled jurisdictions and gathering their freely and happily offered remuneration.²⁸⁶

While these quotes are useful for understanding Ranga’s conception of *dharmā*, his admiration of village life in ancient India also represents an important development in his vision of the village itself. The earlier career Ranga of the 1920s had a sense of the village that was ultimately rooted in physically existing communities in his home region of Guntur which was backed up by robust

²⁸³ Ranga, *Fight*, 1; cf. Kilaru Purna Chandra Rao, ‘N. G. Ranga’, in Parth Shah (ed.), *Profiles in Courage* (New Delhi, 2001), 78ff.

²⁸⁴ Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, 32.

²⁸⁵ Ranga, *Credo*, 359-60.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 379-80.

empirical economic study.²⁸⁷ And, as we have seen, Ranga continued to conduct empirical research into rural conditions during the 1950s. By *Credo of World Peasantry*, however, there is a strong sense of mythologising and other worldliness in Ranga's turn to India's distant past. Thus, Ranga's thought appears to have some 'reactionary' qualities which makes his decision to join Swatantra in 1959 more comprehensible.

In using this term, however, it is important to emphasise its descriptive rather than pejorative connotations.²⁸⁸ 'Reactionary' thought can therefore be defined as an approach to politics which reflects a strong desire to 'turn the clock back and return to some earlier order of society which is seen as having possessed characteristics ... which the present is felt to lack'.²⁸⁹ Therefore, Ranga's admiration of life in the ancient village commonwealths was 'reactionary' in this sense.

However, Ranga's use of this traditional Hindu concept should be placed in the context of the political language of 1950s India, as *Dharma* based appeals have been made by political actors from across the left-right spectrum in India. The right, therefore, does not have a monopoly on it.²⁹⁰ For example, the Gandhian socialist Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982), who led the *bhoodan*²⁹¹ movement (1951-8) which encouraged wealthy landlords to make voluntary land gifts to the landless as a solution to rural poverty and unemployment,²⁹² justified his work by referring to the concept of *dharma*; using it to encourage landlords to give away surplus land to the landless. As Bhattacharyya observes:

Vinoba argued that we need to act without attachment to the fruits of our actions ... [and] believed it was his *dharma* to initiate the Bhoodan Yajña²⁹³ and the Sarvodaya²⁹⁴ Movement ... He practised nonattachment [*sic*] to the results of his actions: regardless of their success or failure, actual or perceived.²⁹⁵

²⁸⁷ Cavale Rao, 'Rurality', 35.

²⁸⁸ Laura Mason, 'The Thermidorian Reaction', in Peter McPhee (ed.), *A Companion to the French Revolution* (Chichester, 2013), 313.

²⁸⁹ Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley (eds.), *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London, 1999), 729.

²⁹⁰ John Abraham, 'In Search of Dharma', *SA: JSA*, 42, 1 (2019), 16-32; cf. Aditya Balasubramanian, 'A More Indian Path to Prosperity?', *Capitalism*, 3, 2 (2022), 333-378.

²⁹¹ Land gift.

²⁹² Taylor C. Sherman, 'A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism?', *IESHR*, 53, 2 (2016), 256-60.

²⁹³ Scheme.

²⁹⁴ Uplift of all.

²⁹⁵ Swasti Bhattacharyya, 'Vinoba's Sarvodaya', in Veena R. Howard and Falon Kartch (eds.), *Gandhi's Global Legacy* (Lanham, 2023), 307.

Surprisingly perhaps, Bhave's movement did not impress Ranga, however, which he criticised for presenting the possession of property as a 'veritable sin' which would undermine 'peasant's passion for land'.²⁹⁶ Ranga would also pen several forceful attacks against *bhoodan*'s later *gramdan*²⁹⁷ iteration, which saw individual peasant proprietors donate their land to the community and live under the rule of the village *panchayat*. Essentially Ranga thought that peasant family farming should remain the basis for rural social life.²⁹⁸

Nevertheless, Ranga always claimed, when pitching his arguments at the national level, that he was looking back to India's past to work towards a socialist future. In other words, this was a 'progressive' rather than a 'reactionary' message. In a bid to make his commitment to egalitarianism undeniably clear, Ranga first stressed that the ancient village communities that inspired him operated according to recognisably 'socialist' principles:

Life of the villagers was thus sought to be made lively, variegated and enjoyable, at the minimum cost. And all that culture and social life were provided to all the people, irrespective of their caste, creed, colour and sex or economic or social or political status in the village.²⁹⁹

However, Ranga emphasised he wasn't calling for a return to the ancient world but urged modern socialists to build on the spirit and achievements of ancient village commonwealths:

Let there be no fear that I wish the world to go back to the past ... No one can ignore what has happened during the last four centuries in the East. The village and the peasant, the artisan and the urban proletariat, the tribal member and the Harijans, their tribal, commonwealth traditions including aims of political and economic democracy and the Ashokan ideals and ethics, the modern machine and the electricity, the aeroplane and the radio have all to be woven together into a complex but scientific, productive but dynamic force. It should be a civilisation suited to the temper, capacity, physical needs, cultural background of the coloured tribes, and oriental peoples. Only such a civilisation can keep up optimistic touch of life aglow in the hearts of the vast millions of all coloured peoples and other colonials. Only that socialism as can absorb such a progressive, historical and sympathetic view of life can uplift them of a much brighter, fuller and more wholesome life than what had ever been enjoyed during the earlier millenniums of Commonwealth Democracies.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ Ranga, *Fight*, 416.

²⁹⁷ Village gift.

²⁹⁸ Ranga, *Panchayat Landlordism*, 36-40.

²⁹⁹ Ranga, *Credo*, 380-1.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 382.

Ranga saw both practical and intellectual value in using the Hindu concept of *dharmā*, as it helped reconcile landed and landless peasants - countering the Communist push for class struggle. His 1957 *Credo of World Peasantry* built on arguments from *Revolutionary Peasants* (1949), where he praised cross-class peasant groups like the Kisan Congress for aligning peasant struggles with the rhetoric of modern revolution, despite not being a Leninist:

An awareness of unity of peasant interests on a national scale, an appreciation of their revolutionary class Dharma and also of the need for winning the co-operation of the proletariat ... The discovery of their Dharma to set right the present inequalities of wealth and income, and consequent achievement of social and cultural opportunities as between the agricultural and non-agricultural peoples, as between the orders as a whole and the capitalist-cum-feudal-cum priestly orders and to save the State from the exploiting classes and place it under the democratic control of the masses ... to save humanity from the ravages of capitalism, imperialism, fascism and periodical economic crises and wars.³⁰¹

It was on this basis that Ranga was led to one resounding point of agreement with reactionary and anti-revolutionary thought, albeit from an 'agrarian populist', or 'peasant socialist' perspective, which was a strong anti-communism:

The Socialists as well as Bolsheviks are aiming at the same achievements and Soviet Russia has yet to achieve them ... Therefore, it is wrong ... to maintain that the ancients were wrong in loving leisure ... and ... that it is always necessary ... that many must be condemned to unrelieved and disproportionate drudgery so that the few can enjoy enough leisure to specialise in fine arts, good living, deep thinking and sky gazing! ... The Oriental village commonwealth was infinitely better and more wholesome and closer to the socialist ideals.³⁰²

Hence why, following the outbreak of the Naxalbari uprising in 1967,³⁰³ the first major outbreak of Maoism in India since the Telangana Rebellions, Ranga would as part of a delegation of Swatantra leaders, urge the Congress Home minister Mr. Y. B. Chavan (1913-1984) to ban the newly formed Maoist Communist Party of India (ML) alongside the CPI and the CPI (M), the latter having been founded following a split in the CPI in 1964.³⁰⁴ Indeed, as made clear in a Swatantra Party pamphlet, Ranga had 'learned the facts of life about Communism in the villages of his home state in Andhra.'³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, 54.

³⁰² Ranga, *Credo*, 381-2.

³⁰³ Rajashri Ghosh, 'Naxalism', *Polish Political Science*, 52, 2 (2023), 7-22.

³⁰⁴ 'Swatantra Urges Ban on Communist Parties', *The Hindu*, 13 May 1969.

³⁰⁵ *Why Swatantra?* (Bombay, n.d.), 30.

Overall, therefore, Ranga's appeals to *dharmā* made effective use, at least theoretically, of an important concept in the legitimating vocabulary of 1950s India, which strengthened his 'agrarian populist' understanding of the peasantry and allowed for his ideology, while progressive and broadly on the left like Ram's and Sahajanand's (see chapters 1-2), to be interpreted in relatively more 'conservative' ways especially should opposition to Indian Communism be deemed necessary.

Ranga's expression of rightist statements, and decision to join Swatantra, may, however, still seem strange given that he had previously advocated an agrarian ideology inflected with anti-industrial sentiments. Not least because the Tata corporation connected and staunch advocate of 'free enterprise' and the 'free market' M. R. Masani (1905-1998), a figure of urban and highly westernised background with no real connections to rural India, who also says he objected to Ranga's appointment as President of the party in his memoirs although without a clear reason and he did not ultimately press the matter,³⁰⁶ was the Party's General Secretary.³⁰⁷ In large part, the answer is probably practical and flows out of the political realities of 1950s India which inhibited the growth of 'agrarian populist' parties. Particularly as Ranga later spoke of the difficulties inherent in launching an opposition party simply off the back of peasants without financial and political backing from urban areas.³⁰⁸

Regardless, the consequence was that the Swatantra Party would look rather different in Ranga's Andhra when compared to its various other provincial units such as Gujarat where it was far more urban and mercantile in character,³⁰⁹ let alone Orissa,³¹⁰ Rajasthan or UP among others, where members of former princely ruling families were key players in their respective

³⁰⁶ M. R. Masani, *Against the Tide* (New Delhi, 1981), 141.

³⁰⁷ Balasubramanian, *Swatantra*, 194-209; cf. Mircea Raianu, *Tata* (Cambridge, MA, 2021), 171-91.

³⁰⁸ N. G. Ranga, 'Bhoodan to Gramdan', [n.d.] in K. V. Pushpa Kumari et al. (eds.), *Self-Employed Peasants and Tribal People* (Nidubrolu, 1983), 15.

³⁰⁹ Erdman, *Swatantra*, 185-6; cf. P. D. Sharma, 'Swatantra Party in Gujarat', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Gujarat University, 1976), 125-6ff.

³¹⁰ Now Odisha.

Swatantra parties.³¹¹ Indeed, Gouthu Latchanna (1909-2006), a key leader of the Andhra Swatantra Party and Ranga ally, firmly focused the party's appeals to the 'agriculturists' of Andhra and in so doing alienated the central party, especially Masani's faction, who allegedly withdrew funding to his unit to prevent him from spending it on rural campaigning during the 1960s.³¹²

But while we have acknowledged a sense of ideological convergence between Ranga's 'agrarian populism' and Indian conservative thought, Ranga's reflection of 1972 that he personally saw Swatantra, from the outset, as being made up of three distinct ideological agendas should be noted here:

I ... gave the highest priority for the protection of Peasant Proprietorship and self-employment of Peasantry and artisans. Bombay friends were more keen on the protection of private enterprise. Rajaji³¹³ was specially bent upon developing Parliamentary Opposition and preventing totalitarianism gaining a stranglehold on our nascent democracy.³¹⁴

Ranga's 'agrarian populism', therefore, appears to have formed one strand of a broader range of ideological sentiments, 'liberal' and 'conservative', contained within the party. Categorising it as 'conservative', therefore probably gives it a stronger sense of ideological coherence than existed at the time.³¹⁵

However, this should not lead us to the conclusion that Swatantra doctrine was therefore incoherent.³¹⁶ Alternatively, I am suggesting in this chapter that the Swatantra Party was, as symbolised by the appointment of Ranga as President of the party in 1959 through a broader protest against Nehruvian agrarian policy, at least in domestic policy, highly 'agrarian populist' in its ideological praxis. After all, at least theoretically, Swatantra could position itself against a new

³¹¹ Gayatri Devi, *A Princess Remembers* (New Delhi, 1995), 271ff; Erdman, *Swatantra*, 22, 48, 115, 122ff; Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 160-3; Srinath Raghavan, *Indira Gandhi* (New Haven, 2025), 46.

³¹² S. P. Lyman and Shriram Mokkapati, 'Bharatiya Jana Sangh and Swatantra', in G. Ram Reddy and B. A. V. Sharma (eds.), *State Government and Politics* (New Delhi, 1979), 350.

³¹³ C. Rajagopalachari.

³¹⁴ Ranga, *Agony*, 588.

³¹⁵ Cf. Erdman, *Swatantra*, 95-108, 120-9; Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 160--209.

³¹⁶ Cf. V. P. Rasam, *Swatantra Party* (Nagpur, 1997), 187; Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Contradictions of Conservatism', *Studies in Indian Politics (SIP)*, 6, 1 (2018), 10n16; Adnan Naseemullah, 'The Political Economy of Economic Conservatism in India', *SIP*, 5, 2 (2017), 239.

‘elite’ of planners and bureaucrats while defending ‘princes’ and leaders like Ranga as legitimate representatives of the ‘peasantry’/the ‘people’. Indeed, to Masani, Mahalanobis was a ‘veteran communist fellow-traveller’, and India’s Planners more generally were ‘bookish intellectuals completely divorced from economic realities’,³¹⁷ who, Rajagopalachari later added, would work merely as university Professors in a ‘free economy.’³¹⁸

This point can be seen strikingly in the fact that, despite not being a force entirely dedicated to his ‘agrarian populist’ ideals, participation in Swatantra allowed Ranga to wield a profound, although temporary influence, in Nehruvian India particularly when we consider that the ‘Nagpur Resolution’ was diluted to cooperation in services, credit and inputs, and thus broadly in line with ‘agrarian populist’ approaches to cooperation (see chapters 1-2 and above), before being scrapped altogether as a consequence of the party’s intervention.³¹⁹

This outcome was largely due to Ranga’s and the party leadership’s ability to exploit the peasantry’s devotion to land, which had all-India appeal. This was especially effective because calls for cooperation were fundamentally a top-down initiative with little precedent, and even in those few places where cooperative schemes had been trialled, they were not popular. Indeed, the journalist Kusum Nair (1919-1993) reported from one village in UP, the words of a peasant who said ‘we all know, now that *chakbandi*³²⁰ has been done, the next step will be to take away our lands. *Russibundi*³²¹ will come here’. Another farmer then added, ‘We hear ... the government will take away our lands and make hotels for us where we will be given our meals’.³²² As a result, C. Subramanian (1910-2000), a key architect of Congress’ agricultural strategy after Nagpur, acknowledged the Indian peasantry was ‘allergic’ to ‘Joint Co-operatives’ in a review of late 1959.³²³

³¹⁷ M. R. Masani, *Congress Misrule and the Swatantra Alternative* (Bombay, 1966), 29.

³¹⁸ C. Rajagopalachari, ‘Prof Friedman Deals with an Enigma’, *Swarajya*, 2 April 1966; cf. Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 150ff.

³¹⁹ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi* (Chicago and London, 1987), 316-18.

³²⁰ Consolidation.

³²¹ Russification?

³²² Kusum Nair, *Blossoms in the Dust* (London, 1961), 75.

³²³ Siegel, *Hungry Nation*, 177.

Furthermore, Swatantra allowed Ranga the opportunity to once-again lead peasant agitations against the government, his erstwhile forte, c.1929-33. In 1961, the Indian Supreme Court ruled, in the case of *Karimbil Kunhikoman vs. State of Kerala*, that the Agrarian Relations Act, passed by the Communist administration in Kerala in 1958, to permit the 'seizure of certain 'estates', was unconstitutional. In response, in 1963, Nehru proposed a seventeenth amendment to the Indian Constitution that would allow for a wider definition of 'estates' which could be taken and re-distributed.³²⁴

The core objection that Ranga had to these revised definitions was the classification of ryotwari landowners within the 'estates' framework, which implied that they were *zamindars*. Emphasising the absurdity of declaring up to 65 million peasant proprietors, most of whom earned below Rs.500 per month, as Estate holders, Ranga argued in the Indian Parliament and in the press that peasants in the *ryotwari* areas held ownership rights to their lands which even the British colonial government, from Munro onwards, the architect of the latter system, had acknowledged, which coheres with 'agrarian populist' positions generally despite their specific application to South Indian revenue particularities (see chapters 1-2). Re-distributing land would cause production to fall and unleash 'social unrest and chaos' from which only the Communists would benefit. To maintain a free society, Ranga concluded, protecting landed property was essential.³²⁵ Indeed, as quoted in a Swatantra Party pamphlet of 1964, Ranga argued that:

It is wrong for the Government to consider their land policy ... to be of greater inflexibility and of greater fixity than the Constitution itself ... [and] will have to answer before the bar of public opinion in this country in regard to this particular matter.³²⁶

Following the efforts of Ranga and other leaders in Parliament, Swatantra organised extensive extra-parliamentary opposition to the legislation. As a result, August 1963 saw 'the first major

³²⁴ Frankel, *Political Economy*, 223-4; cf. Granville Austin, *Working a Democratic Constitution* (New Delhi and New York, 1999), 110-15; Siegel, *Hungry Nation*, 178; Balasubramanian, *Economy*, 280-4.

³²⁵ N. G. Ranga, 'The Seventeenth Amendment', in Pushpa Kumari, *Self-Employed Peasants*, 21-22; idem, 'First Speech Delivered by N. G. Ranga in Lok Sabha ... on the Constitution (17th Amendment) Bill', in idem, *Self-Employed Peasants*, 29; 'Second Speech of Rangaji in Lok Sabha on the Bill ...' in idem, *Self-Employed Peasants*, 57; 'Third Speech Made by ... Ranga in Lok Sabha ... On the Constitution ... Bill', in idem, *Self-Employed Peasants*, 65, 72.

³²⁶ Quoted in *17th Amendment vs Farm, Family, Freedom* (Bombay, 1964), 7.

protest' against the legislation at a conference of southern states in Bangalore³²⁷ organised by the All-India Agriculturalists Federation, an organisation with which Ranga was closely associated and was President of in 1959,³²⁸ and the Mysore³²⁹ unit of the Swatantra Party. Similar conferences were then organised in Saurashtra, Kutch, Punjab, Andhra and other parts of India. Hundreds of thousands of petitions with peasant signatures were then sent to the Secretariat of Parliament from agriculturalists across the country asking for the amendment to be revoked. 'The largest peasant rally ever to be seen in Delhi', the Swatantra party claimed, was then held on 30 March which 5,000 *kisans* from across India attended to protest the bill, which was also reportedly followed by a procession to Parliament House with deputies waiting for the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Deputy Speaker of the Rajya Sabha and the President of India. The assembled protestors organised a *sammelan*³³⁰ with representation from Andhra, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Maharashtra, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. They followed this up with the passage of a resolution which stated that if the 17th Amendment Bill was passed into law, then they would conduct a *satyagraha* against it.³³¹

The *sammelan* was, however, presumably saved from undertaking a *satyagraha* because while the seventeenth amendment bill was passed into law, the amendment ultimately featured a new stipulation, included by conservative Congressmen on the relevant select committee, that any future land reform acts would need to provide full compensation to proprietors at market value.³³² This development made large-scale land reform financially impossible and the *sammelan*'s interests were thus protected at least for the time being as Nehru's socialist developmental agenda was abandoned by his Prime Ministerial successor L. B. Shastri (1904-1966), partly out of

³²⁷ In Karnataka.

³²⁸ Erdman, *Swatantra*, 69-70.

³²⁹ Also in Karnataka.

³³⁰ Conference.

³³¹ 17th Amendment, 9-10.

³³² Frankel, *Political Economy*, 245.

deference to the dominant rural groups, not dissimilar to Ranga's Kammas, upon whom the Congress organisation depended, in favour of a developmental approach that gave much higher priority to agriculture and much less space for statist direction of the economy overall, which remained in place at least in the immediate post-Nehruvian period following Nehru's death in 1964.³³³

IV: Conclusion

This chapter has argued that N.G. Ranga was an 'agrarian populist' who championed a specific political approach, based on peasant proprietorship, service cooperatives and grassroots democracy, to benefit the peasantry against the interests of a 'new class' of managers and bureaucrats - ideas that took full shape in the 1950s during debates on agricultural policy. While relatively more 'conservative' than Sahajanand, although we do not know how Sahajanand would have reacted had he lived to participate in this debate, especially in limiting cooperatives to services rather than production, Ranga's vision nevertheless reflected the evolving concerns of 'agrarian populists', which stands as a corrective to the overlooked role of 'agrarian populism' as a significant ideological force during the Nehruvian era.

To conclude, therefore, Ranga's 'agrarian populism', which was more radical than Ram's but ultimately significantly less so than Sahajanand's, was particularly marked by the fact that, despite his eventual association with the 'conservative' Swatantra Party, he was one of the earliest politicians to adopt populist nomenclature both in the name of a political party and in the name he gave to his own ideology: 'democratic *kisan mazdoor praja raj*'. The main reason for this, apart from his own ideological innovations, was that, compared with Ram and Sahajanand, he lived to participate more fully in the politics of independent India. The spread of universal suffrage and democracy³³⁴ enabled populist rhetoric and terminology to become more explicit and to coexist, at least rhetorically, with the socialist political culture that emerged in 1950s India. Overall,

³³³ Ibid., 246, 250ff.

³³⁴ Cf. Mukulika Banerjee, *Why India Votes?* (New Delhi, 2014).

therefore, in a provisional typology of Indian 'agrarian populism', Ranga's populism, which we might term the 'populism of peasantist social democrats', would sit between the populisms of Ram and Sahajanand.

Chapter 4: ‘Peasant Proprietorship: The Only Remedy’: Charan Singh (1902-87) and the Impact of Agrarian Populism in Post-Nehruvian India, c.1964-80

This chapter examines Charan Singh’s ‘agrarian populist’ ideology, which opposed peasant ‘people’ to urban elites - including moneylenders, landlords, capitalists, and state planners - and promoted peasant proprietorship through Gandhian economics and Hindu jurisprudential ideas on land reform, cooperatives, and democracy. It positions his career, from Arya Samaj activism and *zamindari* abolition in UP to Congress minister and founder of two agrarian parties, culminating in Congress’s 1977 ousting, as the culmination of India’s ‘agrarian populist’ intellectual and political lineage. Thus, it seeks to move the study of Singh beyond the investigation of the growing support for Congress in rural UP,³³⁵ the factional politics of the UP Congress in early independent India,³³⁶ and his role in securing Congress’ first national defeat in post-colonial Indian politics at the 1977 Indian elections plus his role in the Janata Party government thereafter, 1977-9,³³⁷ to work towards a better understanding of the precise nature of the ideology of one of, if not the most, successful agrarian politicians in India.

Current literature presents three views on Charan Singh’s ‘agrarian populist’ ideology. First, as noted earlier, Byres sees it as an Indian version of Russian ‘neo-populism’.³³⁸ Citing Kerblay’s introduction to the thought of Chayanov,³³⁹ Byres defines ‘neo-populism’ as defending rich peasants, opposing revolution, and accepting industrialisation only if agriculture fails. He sees Singh’s version as marked by anti-landlordism, support for peasant ownership, rejection of collectivism, anti-capitalism, belief in small farm productive superiority, and views favouring agriculture over urban interests while rejecting peasant class analysis.³⁴⁰ However, this view is

³³⁵ D. A. Low, ‘Introduction’, in idem, *Congress*, 21.

³³⁶ Paul R. Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State* (Berkeley, 1965), 139-66; idem, ‘Uttar Pradesh’, in Myron Weiner (ed.), *State Politics in India* (Princeton, 1968), 101ff; Lance Brennan, ‘From One Raj to Another’, in Low, *Congress*, 494-5.

³³⁷ Frankel, *Political Economy*, 385-7; Corbridge and Harriss, *India*, 82-3, 88-92; Misra, *VCT*, 314-17, 323-4, 341-42, 356-8; Guha, *India*, 516-529, 534-41.

³³⁸ Byres, ‘Charan Singh’, 168-9.

³³⁹ Basile Kerblay, ‘A. V. Chayanov’, in Daniel Thorner et al. (eds.), *A. V. Chayanov* (Homewood, IL, 1966), xxv-lxxv.

³⁴⁰ Byres, ‘Charan Singh’, 171-80.

problematic as it places Singh's ideology within Russian 'neo-populist' thought, which was more communal (see introduction). In contrast, Singh emphasised individual peasant ownership and opposed collectivist farming - which Byres acknowledges alongside his support for service-based cooperatives.³⁴¹

Furthermore, we also noted earlier that Jaffrelot and Tillin analyse Singh's ideology as 'agrarian populism,' framing rural poor interests against merchants, money lenders, and urban groups. Unlike Byres, they do not comment on Singh's stance on collective farming and cooperatives,³⁴² although they acknowledge his support for rural-focused development.³⁴³

Finally, while Brass does not dedicate a full chapter to analysing Singh's ideology, his essential study confirms Singh's strong opposition to cooperative farming and his genuine commitment to democratic principles plus his defence of peasant proprietary rights against urban capitalists.³⁴⁴ Brass also highlights Singh's key work, *India's Poverty and its Solution* (1964),³⁴⁵ as a defence of peasant proprietorship as the best system to achieve both economic development and democratic goals.³⁴⁶ However, while his study is primarily biographical and provides invaluable insights, it does not fully contextualise or integrate Charan Singh's contribution within the broader political and intellectual history of 'agrarian populism' in India, the subject of this thesis.

The following chapter therefore refines Singh's 'agrarian populism,' marked by a specific approach to land reform, cooperatives, and parliamentary democracy broadly designed to make as many small peasant proprietors as possible, link them through service cooperatives and organise them politically to dominate an agrarian centered democracy, comparing it to Chhotu Ram, Sahajanand, and Ranga. It explores Singh's background and *zamindari* abolition efforts, highlighting his vision of the 'peasant proprietor' central to UP's post-independence land reform.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 173-5.

³⁴² Cf. Jaffrelot, *Silent Revolution*, 282.

³⁴³ Jaffrelot and Tillin, 'Populism', 182-4; cf. Praveen Dhanda, 'Ideas of Charan Singh', *EPW*, 54, 14 (2019), 35-42.

³⁴⁴ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, ch. 5, part V-VI; idem, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 2 (New Delhi and London, 2012), parts II-III; idem, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, parts I-III.

³⁴⁵ Charan Singh, *India's Poverty and Its Solution* (Bombay, 1964).

³⁴⁶ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 13-14.

It then examines his Nehruvian-era developmental vision promoting service-based cooperatives, echoing Ranga, and finally his commitment to parliamentary democracy during the Janata Party's role in restoring democracy after the 1975-77 Emergency.

The chapter argues that while Charan Singh's 'agrarian populism', which pitched the peasantry against the full spectrum of 'elites' Indian 'agrarian populists' railed against thus far i.e. money lenders, aristocratic landlords, capitalists and planning officials, promoted land reform to extend peasant proprietorship in the countryside, service cooperatives, and grassroots democracy worked by peasant based parties, the latter of which Singh executed far more successfully than Ram, Sahajanand or Ranga before him, it was, while broadly 'leftist' like Ram and others, less 'socialist' in rhetoric than Sahajanand's and Ranga's, despite the latter joining the Swatantra Party. Singh rarely used *kisan-mazdoor* unity language, except once noting a call among Congressmen for a 'Peasants' and Workers' *Raj*'.³⁴⁷ In large part, this was because, despite one of Singh's parties working with a breakaway faction of the AIKS around 1970,³⁴⁸ he was not involved at all in the UP branch of the AIKS during the 1930s.³⁴⁹

Therefore, while Singh did occasionally say that he believed in a 'Gandhian' form of socialism, and Gandhi himself claimed his thought was a form of 'socialism',³⁵⁰ Singh was not a socialist at least not in the way that Sahajanand or Ranga were, despite the fact that card-carrying Socialists participated in the opposition parties he established.³⁵¹ His relative lack of 'socialism' gave his 'agrarian populism' a distinctly different character compared to Sahajanand's and Ranga's. Nevertheless, Singh's thought can be distinguished from Chhotu Ram's by its absorption and precise reading of Gandhian economic thought, following Ranga's approach in this respect. This Gandhian influence was also key to its success in UP and national politics,

³⁴⁷ Singh, *Cultivators*, 3. Emphasis original.

³⁴⁸ Rasul, *Kisan Sabha*, 360.

³⁴⁹ See introduction.

³⁵⁰ M. K. Gandhi, *My Socialism* [1937-1946] (Ahmedabad, 1959), 1-53.

³⁵¹ Zoya Hasan, *Quest for Power* (New Delhi, 1998), 28.

c.1964-77 as it offered the strongest possible justification for the creed and contributed to a broader Gandhian *zeitgeist* in Indian politics, apparent when the Janata Party took power.

Furthermore, among Indian ‘agrarian populism’ ideologues, Singh’s greater success was largely due to timing. After Nehru’s death in 1964 and Shastri’s brief premiership, Congress was destabilised by internal ideological warfare over Indira Gandhi’s renewal of Nehruvian ‘socialism’.³⁵² In the 1967 elections, rising regional parties challenged Congress, causing losses in many states and sparking fractious regional politics.³⁵³ Disillusioned with Congress leadership, Singh resigned from it after the 1967 elections, positioning himself to capitalise on its declining dominance. This allowed his ‘Gandhian’-‘agrarian populist’ ideology to help revive Gandhian economic ideas, strongly shaping the Janata Party’s agenda when it took power in 1977.

I: ‘What Should Take its Place?’ *Zamindari* Abolition and Singh’s Case for Peasant Proprietorship, c.1902-1956

This section explores Singh’s background and argues he leveraged Congress’ 1946 adoption of *zamindari* abolition to promote peasant proprietorship as a unifying ideal for UP peasants, highlighting its economic, environmental, and political benefits. This became the cornerstone of his ‘agrarian populism’, for this group was who he sought to appeal to, above all, by claiming to represent the ‘people’ of UP, alongside his growing support for service cooperatives and grassroots parliamentary democracy, which Ram, Sahajanand and Ranga supported before him.

Singh was born at Noorpur village, in the Meerut district of western United Provinces³⁵⁴ in 1902 in ‘the house of an ordinary peasant’ as he recalled in a 1972 interview.³⁵⁵ An area well served by canal irrigation,³⁵⁶ this made it comparable to conditions in West Punjab (see chapter 1) and, unlike much of eastern UP and Bihar (see chapter 2), small-scale landlordism was more

³⁵² Raghavan, *Indira*, 1-69; cf. Sherman, *Nehru’s India*, ch. 4.

³⁵³ Stanley A. Kochanek, *The Congress Party of India* (Princeton, 1968); 407-447; Subhash C. Kashyap, *The Politics of Defection* (New Delhi, 1969), *passim*; Rajni Kothari, ‘The Political Change of 1967’, *EPW*, 6, 3/5 (1971), 231-250.

³⁵⁴ Now Uttar Pradesh.

³⁵⁵ Sarbjot Kaur (trans.), ‘Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Oral History Interview’, 67, 74, *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/1972%20February%20Interview%20with%20Chaudhary%20Charan%20Singh%20-%20NMML.pdf> (Accessed 11/09/25).

³⁵⁶ Stone, *Irrigation*, ch. 8.

dominant and agriculture more productive.³⁵⁷ Thus, Nevil asserted in 1904 that the nature of agricultural cultivation had ‘reached a very high standard in Meerut’ with sugarcane, mazie, *juar*,³⁵⁸ among various other crops, all cultivated in the district by this date.³⁵⁹ Singh’s father, Meer Singh, was a tenant sharecropper farmer who worked on five acres of land and paid revenue to the local *zamindar* in Kuchesar,³⁶⁰ whose estates were located in modern Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh.³⁶¹

The Singhs were, like Chhotu Ram’s family, Jats, a peasant caste, who were described in 1904 as the ‘most important and most industrious of all the cultivators ... in the entire Meerut division’, who owned 27% of the district’s land in 1901,³⁶² and among whom there was a strong commitment to, or aspiration towards, the ideal of proprietorship.³⁶³ Indeed, by 1940, within the Jat community there were:

[F]ew big landlords ... and their strength lies mainly in numerous communities of thrifty hard-working small farmers who cultivate their own land and are generally in comfortable ... circumstances.³⁶⁴

After Singh’s birth, his family moved on an upward trajectory towards this status when, in response to the local *zamindar* reclaiming his father’s land, they moved to Jani Khurd village, where they bought 10 acres of land. The exact financing of this land purchase is unclear, but savings from two of Singh’s uncles who served in the Boer War (1899-1902) may have helped. At fourteen, Singh’s family moved to Bhadaula village onto a similar holding, living with his uncles. Singh therefore came from a recently established peasant proprietor family and took pride in his background. However, he did not follow his father into the fields, instead undertaking secondary education at the Government High School in Meerut town. He then

³⁵⁷ Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge, 1978), 228-242.

³⁵⁸ Grain.

³⁵⁹ H. R. Nevill, *Meerut District* (Allahabad, 1904), 35-47.

³⁶⁰ Harsh Singh Lohit, *Charan Singh, 1902-1987* (Gurugram, 2018), 5.

³⁶¹ ‘District Bulandshahr’, *Government of Uttar Pradesh*, <https://bulandshahr.nic.in/district-profile/> (Accessed 25/06/25).

³⁶² Nevill, *Meerut*, 88-9.

³⁶³ M. C. Pradhan, *The Political System of the Jats of Northern India* (London and Bombay, 1966), chs 3, 6; Byres, ‘Charan Singh’, 142-3.

³⁶⁴ *Final Settlement Report of the Meerut District* (Allahabad, 1940), 13.

earned a BSc at Agra College in 1923 followed by further degrees in History (MA, 1925) and Law (LLB, 1926).³⁶⁵

Moving to Ghaziabad³⁶⁶ in 1928, Singh therefore began work as a civil lawyer. In 1929, and more significantly given his later development, he joined Congress, establishing the Congress Committee in Ghaziabad in collaboration with colleagues there.³⁶⁷ While this might seem like a sudden new interest, Singh's political consciousness extended back into this youth:

As far as politics is concerned, my attention in the very beginning was drawn towards the plight or slavery of the country. During that time, in 1918-1919, I read '*Bharat Bharati*'³⁶⁸ written by Shri Maithilisharan ji Gupt.³⁶⁹ This gave rise to patriotic feeling in many of my generation. Mahatmaj's movement³⁷⁰ started when I was studying in the tenth grade ... Jallianwala Bagh happened on 13 April.³⁷¹ These events ... influenced my political life.³⁷²

Singh's nationalism therefore had reasonably deep roots and he was, like Ram, strongly influenced by Arya Samajist doctrine. His 1972 interviewer noted that Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the sect's founder, promoted wearing *swadeshi* clothes.³⁷³ In response, Singh acknowledged that his belief in using domestically made products was influenced by Dayanand's teachings, but emphasised that Gandhi initiated it as a well-planned mass movement. When noting the Arya Samaj's strong political influence in Western U.P. and Punjab, Singh explained that its emphasis on pride in past Indian achievements gave the Jats a foundation for their nationalism. Thus, while Singh's parents were 'uneducated farmers' and not Arya Samajists themselves, 'the influence of [the] Arya Samaj was present in the entire environment' during his upbringing:³⁷⁴

I remember there was a small book of bhajans³⁷⁵ at that time which had propaganda against alcohol and meat, that also had an effect on me. One of my uncles had retired from the army,

³⁶⁵ Charan Singh, *Land Reforms in UP and the Kulaks* (New Delhi, 1986), 1; cf. 'Interview', 71-2; Byres, 'Charan Singh', 142-3; Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 25-8.

³⁶⁶ A city now in western UP.

³⁶⁷ Kaur, 'Interview', 72.

³⁶⁸ Maithilisharan Gupt, *Bharata-Bharati [The Soul of India]* [1912] (Chicago, 1977).

³⁶⁹ A distinguished Hindi poet with nationalist leanings (1864-1964).

³⁷⁰ The Non-Cooperation movement.

³⁷¹ I.e. the Amritsar Massacre of 1919.

³⁷² 'Interview', 69.

³⁷³ J. T. F. Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati* (New Delhi, 1978), 127-59.

³⁷⁴ 'Interview', 69.

³⁷⁵ Religious songs.

I saw *Satyarth Prakash*³⁷⁶ with him during my childhood. I did not understand this book much at that time, but the Arya Samaj continued affecting me visibly and invisibly in these ways.³⁷⁷

Singh's Arya Samajist influence was significant, as alongside his work as a lawyer and Congress leader in the 1930s, he was also a Samaj activist, serving as General Secretary and President of the Ghaziabad branch for whom he would 'organise public meetings'. But due to his legal and political work, it mostly 'remained a private, religious aspect' of his identity. In 1972, when asked if he supported the Arya Samaj's progressive views on widow remarriage and modern education, which differed from traditional Hindu beliefs, Singh responded that 'the thoughts of Arya Samaj and Swamiji became my thoughts',³⁷⁸ which were later displayed in a book he wrote for his children.³⁷⁹

The importance of nationalist idealism to Singh, moreover, is revealed strikingly by the fact that, like Sahajanand (see chapter 2), after Gandhi launched the civil disobedience campaigns following his salt march from March to April of 1930 (see chapters 2), Singh was imprisoned for six months for participating in them:³⁸⁰

When Mahatma ji³⁸¹ went on the Dandi March,³⁸² prominent Congressmen of Meerut came to Ghaziabad to make salt. There is a locality near Ghaziabad called Loni. It is said that earlier salt (*Lavan*) was made there, due to which its name became Loni ... At that time, we also went there, so we were arrested and were incarcerated in Meerut Jail.³⁸³

Although linking Singh's early politics directly is difficult, western UP's role as a civil disobedience hotspot contextualises his involvement. Salt, vital to peasants, fell sharply in price in late 1930 due to the Great Depression, sparking peasant protests organised quickly by the provincial Congress.³⁸⁴ In fact, the British were fortunate, given Gandhi's eventual decision to pause the agitations via his pact with Lord Irwin in March 1931, to have avoided a full-blown

³⁷⁶ Dayananad's key theological work. Cf. idem, *Light of Truth* [1875] (Allahabad, 1915); Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati*, 99-126.

³⁷⁷ 'Interview', 69-70.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 70.

³⁷⁹ Charan Singh, *Shistachar [Etiquette]* [1954] (New Delhi, 1984).

³⁸⁰ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 1.

³⁸¹ Gandhi.

³⁸² The salt march of 1930.

³⁸³ 'Interview', 72.

³⁸⁴ Rothermund, *Depression*, 102.

peasant rebellion because, on account of specific workings of the *zamindari* system in the region, rents were atypically high and the British lacked the legal machinery to introduce remissions of land revenue as they had done in Punjab (see chapter 1) which made the situation potentially explosive.³⁸⁵ Even to J. Nehru, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact represented a ‘humiliation’ of the Indian people who had pledged to support the salt *satyagraha*.³⁸⁶

Following his release from prison, Singh quickly established a solid base among the Jats of rural Meerut, which secured his election to the district board, where he served as vice-chairman from 1930-5, and ultimately to the UP Legislative Assembly following the election of a Congress government in the province at the 1937 elections.³⁸⁷ According to Singh, Congress suffered little competition during these elections and he was easily elected:

The National Agriculturalist Party was a party of the Zamindars,³⁸⁸ that was the only one that competed with the Congress, there was no other party ... The candidates who stood against me belonged to that party. They had organized themselves hastily, and I don’t know whether they had an organization in Meerut or not. They were not really able to oppose much [*sic*].³⁸⁹

While, similarly to Bihar and Madras to some extent, and largely by contrast to the ‘imperial populist’ Punjab government, the British saw UP’s aristocratic landlords as the ‘natural leaders’ of the local agrarian society, and landlords held most seats in the UP legislative council after the 1920 and 1923 UP elections,³⁹⁰ the growth of Congress from the late 1920s had proved inexorable,³⁹¹ notwithstanding the best efforts of Hailey, the former Punjab Governor (see chapter 1) who became the Governor of UP in 1928,³⁹² to organise UP *zamindars* politically on account of their suspicion of British motives and inability to put their own differences aside.³⁹³

³⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, 120-1.

³⁸⁶ Nehru, *Autobiography*, 249-70; Gopal, *Nehru*, 150-1; Brown, *Disobedience*, 200-1.

³⁸⁷ ‘Interview’, 67.

³⁸⁸ Cf. P. D. Reeves, ‘Landlords and Party Politics in the United Provinces’, in D. A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (London, 1968), 261ff.

³⁸⁹ ‘Interview’, 73.

³⁹⁰ P. D. Reeves, *Landlords and Governments in Uttar Pradesh* (Bombay and Oxford, 1991), chs. 1-3; cf. Thomas R. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords, and the British Raj* (Berkeley and London, 1979), 198, 328 and *passim*.

³⁹¹ Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh* (London, 2002), ch. 4.

³⁹² Cell, *Hailey*, chs. 11-14.

³⁹³ Reeves, *Landlords*, 210ff.

The Congress victory of 1937 therefore allowed Singh, now a UP MLA,³⁹⁴ to immerse himself in rural matters. In April 1938, he introduced the UP's Agricultural Produce Marketing Bill.³⁹⁵ The aim of the bill, Singh declared in retrospect, was to 'safeguard the interests of the producer against the rapacity of the trader',³⁹⁶ especially by standardising weights and measures in markets to prevent fraud and poor prices for peasant commodities, *inter alia*.³⁹⁷

While this bill was eventually implemented in most Indian states, first in Punjab in 1939 where it ensured that cultivators received a fair price for their crops via government regulated markets (*mandis*),³⁹⁸ which was in part a product of close contact between Singh and Chhotu Ram albeit through the latter's colleague Tika Ram,³⁹⁹ it was not actually given legal effect in UP until 1964, allegedly due to opposition from 'the representatives of vested interests who were entrenched in high places both in the Congress and its Government.'⁴⁰⁰

Despite this, during his time as a UP MLA, Singh undertook at least two other legislative efforts on behalf of UP's peasantry. Thus, his Land Utilisation Bill of April 1939 aimed to provide agricultural tenants with the means to acquire proprietary rights if they gave a fixed sum to the government to pass on to their landlord (*zamindar*).⁴⁰¹ Unfortunately, however, the bill attracted powerful opposition from the *zamindars* and their representatives and was consequently not introduced into the UP Assembly.⁴⁰²

Despite this, Singh made an important intervention in the debates on the United Provinces Agriculturalists and Workmen Debt Redemption Bill,⁴⁰³ a piece of debt relief legislation

³⁹⁴ Member of the Legislative Assembly.

³⁹⁵ *Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of the United Provinces (PLAUP)*, vol. 6 (Allahabad, 1938), 356.

³⁹⁶ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 2.

³⁹⁷ *PLAUP*, vol. 6, (1938), 357-60.

³⁹⁸ CR, 'Agricultural Produce Markets Bill', in Tanwar, *Sir Chhotu Ram*, vol. 3, 4ff; cf. Chowdhry, *Politics*, 277-8ff.

³⁹⁹ 'Correspondence of Ch. Tika Ram with Charan Singh' (1938), *Jatland.com*, https://www.jatland.com/w/images/8/8d/1938-June-26_From_Ch_Tika_Ram_to_CS.pdf, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁴⁰⁰ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 2.

⁴⁰¹ 'The U.P. Land Utilization Bill and Related Correspondence', Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., II, S. No. 2, 5-10; cf. Singh, *Land Reforms*, 3.

⁴⁰² 'Active in Presenting Progressive Rural and Farmer Friendly Legislation to the Congress Legislative Party and the Assembly ...', *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/life-history/active-presenting-progressive-rural-and-farmer-friendly-legislation-congress>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁴⁰³ *PLAUP*, vol 17, (1939), 19-23.

introduced into the Assembly on 17 April 1939,⁴⁰⁴ which, Singh later said, ‘brought great relief to the peasantry’ and which he vigorously defended amid blowback from the money lending community.⁴⁰⁵

Regardless, Singh was not particularly happy with the record of the UP Congress during this period, c.1937-9. Indeed, in his 1972 NMML interview, he contrasted his party’s progress on agrarian reform in unfavourable terms with that made by Chhotu Ram’s Unionist Party in passing measures for the benefit of the *kisans* (see chapter 1), which, to some extent, appears to justify Ram’s decision to work with rather than against the colonial state at least in the short term, especially given the difficulties Sahajanand and Ranga experienced in Congress (see chapters 2-3), although this strategy was only really possible in Punjab:

I had seen at that time that Nehru is not going to prove a [good?] leader. In 1937, after 2 months, people here began to feel that their expectations from the Congress administration were not being fulfilled ... On the other hand, there was a Unionist government in Punjab at that time [*sic*] had a good record.⁴⁰⁶

Ultimately, of course, the UP provincial government was brought to a premature end given the Congress line taken in response to Linlithgow’s declaration of war on behalf of India in response to the outbreak of WWII (see chapter 2). During this period, Singh participated both in Gandhi’s individual *satyagraha* movement in 1940, a shift in civil disobedience strategy, initiated by Gandhi which limited the campaign to select individuals like Bhave and Nehru, rather than the masses, to protest India’s involvement in WWII,⁴⁰⁷ and the ‘Quit-India’ movement of 1942 (see chapter 2).⁴⁰⁸ Commenting on the widespread violence that erupted across India during the latter campaign (see chapter 2), Singh insisted in his 1972 interview that:

[I]f Gandhiji had been asked he would have said that what happened was not right, but at the same time my view is that Mahatma Ji wanted that no one should ask him anything, do whatever you want ... this seemed to me a change in his attitude.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁰⁵ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 3.

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Interview’, 83.

⁴⁰⁷ Guha, *Gandhi*, 628-31ff.

⁴⁰⁸ ‘Interview’, 76-7.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 78.

Thus, after WWII, Singh's commitment to solving problems of rural India via parliamentary means quickly became unambiguously clear. In 1946, he was appointed to the position of parliamentary secretary in the government of G. B. Pant (1887-1961)⁴¹⁰ in UP from 1946-50. Although this was a relatively junior post,⁴¹¹ he became the driving force behind the government's efforts to abolish the *zamindari* system in UP.⁴¹² Its demands established the context for Singh to fully articulate the case for a system of peasant proprietorship to become the new basis for rural society in the state. Therefore, we should enquire further, as we touched upon this in chapters 2 and 3, into how Congress came to accept the policy.

The problems that Congress was attempting to solve through *zamindari* abolition had deep roots in British colonial policy. The 1793 Permanent Settlement introduced the *zamindari* system, creating large landlords who collected revenue for the state.⁴¹³ By 1948, only 2 of 63 million in UP owned land - 85% of them smallholders with just 20% of the land, while 15% controlled 80%, with the top 1% paying 58% of land revenue.⁴¹⁴

Following Gandhi's emergence as Congress leader in 1920, Indian nationalists increasingly criticised *zamindari* taxation as a central injustice of British rule in India.⁴¹⁵ Congress agrarian policy prioritised upper-caste tenants of large *zamindars* and small *zamindars*, the latter paying under Rs. 100 annually. In 1931, it formally proposed reforming the *zamindari* system by reducing rents and revenues for small peasants, exempting uneconomic holdings, and introducing a progressive land income tax, with compensation for small estate holders.⁴¹⁶

As the 1930s progressed (see chapter 2), new leftist organisations, such as the CSP and AIKS, demanded a more radical policy on the *zamindari* system. The former was calling for 'the

⁴¹⁰ Bayly, 'Ends of Liberalism', 617-18 and *passim*.

⁴¹¹ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 1; cf. 'Interview', 99.

⁴¹² 'Interview', 99-100.

⁴¹³ Guha, *Rule of Property*.

⁴¹⁴ Stokes, *Peasant*, 205.

⁴¹⁵ Govindu and Malghan, *Freedom*, 255-6.

⁴¹⁶ P. D. Reeves, 'The Congress and the Abolition of Zamindari in Uttar Pradesh', *South Asia*, 8, 1-2 (1985), 154; cf. Robert I. Crane, 'The Indian National Congress and the Indian Agrarian Problem', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1951), 25-63.

elimination of princes and landlords ... without compensation', *inter alia*.⁴¹⁷ The basic demand of the latter was the abolition of landlordism and transfer of all land rights to cultivators.⁴¹⁸

Despite this, the Congress' 'Faizpur Programme' of 1936, which outlined the party's most comprehensive statement of agrarian policy hitherto,⁴¹⁹ fell short of demanding *zamindari* abolition instead preferring simply to review rents, provide exemptions from land tax for uneconomic holdings and remove feudal dues. The main obstacle was Congress's lack of consensus on abolishing *zamindari* - whether to compensate ex-landlords, maintain private land rights, transfer rights to the state, or adopt peasant proprietorship, cooperative, or collective farming.⁴²⁰

Despite Congress' equivocation, Singh's views by 1939 were crystal clear. In his 'Peasant Proprietorship or Land to the Worker' (1939), an article published in the *National Herald* newspaper,⁴²¹ Singh acknowledged that property was increasingly viewed less as an absolute individual right and more as a social responsibility to serve the common good. But he nevertheless argued forcefully that owning land privately 'confers upon its owner powers over his fellow-citizens which owners of other forms of property do not possess'.⁴²² To make his case, Singh proceeded with a potted history of land usage in India:

In the old days, land was neither sold nor bought in India, but was free for any man to use like other gifts in nature. It vested in the entire village community and the idea of private ownership was non-existent. The Muslim rulers also did not interfere in the structure of village communities so long as their share of dues was paid. But the British conquering India farmed out land by public auction to the highest bidders and turned the ... tax gatherers - of the Mogul period into full-fledged owners. This gave rise to rack-renting which has almost killed the peasantry.⁴²³

Commenting on the present, Singh observed that across India, the system of land ownership was largely uniform, with only minor differences, typically showing a pattern where the real farmers

⁴¹⁷ Quoted in Reeves, 'Zamindari', 155.

⁴¹⁸ N. G. Ranga, *Kisan Handbook* (Madras, 1938), 5.

⁴¹⁹ Crane, 'Congress', 90-9.

⁴²⁰ Reeves, 'Zamindari', 155.

⁴²¹ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 3.

⁴²² Charan Singh, 'Peasant Proprietorship or Land to the Worker', (1939), Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., II, S. No. 1, n.p.

⁴²³ Ibid.

are distanced from the state by layers of intermediaries. To Singh, this was unfortunate because the:

[T]enant ... all over the world ... [has] a fanatical attachment to the land he tills ... [and] has no incentive in this country to make improvements.⁴²⁴

Following this, Singh made an argument that informed the heart of his intellectual and political life thereafter:

The peasant who owns his holding has been known to cultivate it more efficiently than the one who is merely a tenant at will ... but this condition is sadly lacking in the present zamindari system. It has consequently resulted in improper and insufficient utilization of the nation's greatest source of wealth.⁴²⁵

With that, Singh introduced a thesis, which he would later buttress with a vast array of empirical data, that smaller farms worked by peasant proprietors were more productive than larger farms. However, in this 1939 piece, he used the above argument to argue powerfully for the end of the *zamindari* system, which he critiqued in the following terms through a blend of moralist, utilitarian and nationalist arguments:

The system takes no notice of the necessities of the peasant and, after payment of his rent, a very small portion of the produce is left to him. More often than not, it is insufficient to maintain him and the members of his family. The system further breeds a class of persons - the big landlords who are parasites on society. They do not themselves produce anything, nor do they add to the wealth, or contribute to the happiness of the nation in any way. With honourable exceptions, they simply pass their lives in luxurious pursuits. The system has resulted in a lowering of the national character.⁴²⁶

Such arguments led Singh to ambitiously conclude his piece by sketching out what an 'alternative' land revenue system might look like. We will explore Singh's suggestions concerning this in detail soon, although it will suffice to say presently that Singh, like Ram, Sahajanand and Ranga before him (see chapters 1-3), supported peasant proprietorship - land owned by its cultivators - as the ideal system, believing it would tie land use to those whose primary work was agriculture and ensure it served the national interest. In fact, Singh thought that if 'the owner

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

does not fulfil the social and economic duties incumbent upon property, he must be treated as a speculator and should be divested.⁴²⁷

Fortunately for Singh, Congress would soon allow him the opportunity to pursue his ideals when the elections of 1945-6 led the party, as noted in chapter 2, to clearly endorse *zamindari* abolition for the first time.⁴²⁸ In fact, Singh himself was made responsible for drafting the UP Congress 'Manifesto on Land and Agriculture' (1945) which was approved by *kisan* activists under the leadership of Narendra Deva, who had been the CSP's key theoretician in the 1930s and a figure with whom Sahajanand had worked in the AIKS (see chapter 2), in Varanasi in November 1945.⁴²⁹ In this document, Singh asserted that:

The Indian National Congress declares that the time has arrived to take steps to effect a radical change in the relationship of the soil with the person who actually cultivates it. That land shall in future be allowed to be owned only by him who is prepared to cultivate it himself. ... The rights of non-cultivating owners who live on rent or trade-in land shall, therefore, be liquidated with compensation, if possible, without compensation, if necessary ... and in their place will arise a peasant who is at once a proprietor and a wage-earner.⁴³⁰

In addition to Deva's support, Singh would also claim in a later pamphlet that Gandhi, who as we saw in chapters 2-3 had moved closer towards *zamindari* abolition by this time, had actually 'advised the Congress High Command in December 1945, at the time the Election Manifesto was drafted, to provide for 'equitable compensation' thereby effectively approving the abolition of the entire system.'⁴³¹

This decision to approve *zamindari* abolition allowed the UP Congress, which was under severe electoral pressure from the Muslim League during the 1945-6 elections in UP, a province in which the League found much of its early support,⁴³² and now was mobilising behind its demand for 'independent Muslim states',⁴³³ which had emerged only in 1940 (see chapter 2), to

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ *What Congress Fights for* (Bombay, 1945), 6.

⁴²⁹ 'Draft Manifesto on Land and Agriculture', (1945), Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., II, S. No. 5, 1-5; cf. Singh, *Land Reforms*, 3-4.

⁴³⁰ 'Congress Manifesto on Land and Agriculture', (1945), Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., II, S. No. 4, 1-2.

⁴³¹ Charan Singh, 'Abolition of Zamindari in U.P.', (1949), Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., II, S. No. 28, 5.

⁴³² Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims* (London, 1974), *passim*.

⁴³³ Venkat Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina* (Cambridge, 2015), 194-263, 389ff, 460.

argue that Indian Muslims would be better served by their reform minded agenda, which now included *zamindari* abolition, than by the League's programme, which they charged with representing the community's elites. Given many large *zamindars* were Muslim, on the day before the elections, an editorial of the Congress supporting *National Herald* newspaper asked what Muslims living in the villages of Agra and Oudh had in common 'with the rich taluqdars and zamindars of the community?'⁴³⁴

A man of UP himself, Nehru, meanwhile, had, given that it appeared in the Congress Manifesto, personally endorsed the policy when he wrote that:

[T]he agrarian question was the dominating social issue and ... the Zamindari system should be abolished.⁴³⁵

As we saw in chapter 2, the CPI was also seeking to broaden its base and was also calling for the 'abolition of landlordism' although on a rather moderate basis in line with its leader Joshi's 'constitutional communism' strategy.

As a result, following Congress' commanding victory in the elections,⁴³⁶ G. B. Pant's government issued the following resolution to the UP assembly on 19 July 1946:

This assembly accepts the principle of the abolition of the zamindari system ..., which involves various intermediaries between the cultivators and the State, and resolves that the rights of such intermediaries should be acquired on payment of equitable compensation, and that the Government should appoint a committee to prepare a scheme for this purpose.⁴³⁷

Despite protests from League and *zamindar* members, the resolution passed. In October 1946, the UP government formed the Zamindari Abolition Committee (ZAC), including Pant, his supporters, and the left-leaning members A.P. Jain (1902-1977) and Vishambhar Dayal Tripathi, who prosecuted for cooperative farming.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ Quoted in Reeves, 'Zamindari', 156.

⁴³⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* [1946] (London, 1989), 371.

⁴³⁶ P. D. Reeves, 'Changing Patterns of Political Alignment in the General Elections to the United Provinces Legislative Assembly', *MAS*, 5, 2 (1971), 128-9.

⁴³⁷ *PLAUP*, vol. 23, (1946), 84.

⁴³⁸ Reeves, 'Zamindari', 157-8.

The formation of the ZAC provided the immediate short-term context for Singh's first major work: *Abolition of Zamindari: Two Alternatives* (1947),⁴³⁹ which sought to answer the question of what should replace the *zamindari* system by popularising the case for a system of a peasant proprietorship as opposed to nationalising UP's land and collectivising agriculture,⁴⁴⁰ which as we saw in chapter 2, Sahajanand was more or less championing by this point. In this book, Singh therefore presented a complex case for peasant proprietorship. In so doing, Singh began from the premise, which he had introduced in his 1939 article discussed earlier,⁴⁴¹ that the individual ownership of land had an intrinsic value and appeal to peasants:

The idea of ownership ... gives a feeling of security and a sense of attachment to, or interest in, land which nothing else calls out so strongly. There is a certain psychological satisfaction in the private ownership of one's farm which neither socialisation nor any law on the restriction of the landlord's rights can supply. A peasant owner has been known to work harder and for longer hours than a tenant or a wage-labourer; the reward that he gets for his labour lies more in mental satisfaction and less in pecuniary gain.⁴⁴²

This essentially psychological argument apart, Singh also pointed to practical advantages of establishing such a system in terms of their general well-being. First, if peasants did not have to pay high levels of rent to private landlords, they would be able to feed themselves better, their health would improve, become more productive and more social. Furthermore, as demand for 'comfort, health and education' rises in rural areas, urban markets would become more sophisticated, offering better products to peasants and thereby further increase their standard of living. Second, a system of peasant proprietorship would abolish intermediaries between peasants and the state with the tenant becoming both a wage-earner and a proprietor. In turn, this would lead to the achievement of a peaceful rural society, as the peasantry would be free from the persecuting landlord and 'an almost classless society' would be formed. Third, the extension of peasant proprietary rights would lead the countryside to 'blossom into a better life'. The relative condition of peasants in Western UP, specifically Meerut and Muzaffarnagar districts where

⁴³⁹ Singh, *Abolition*.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., iii; cf. 'Interview', 99-100.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Singh, 'Peasant Proprietorship'.

⁴⁴² Singh, *Abolition*, 132.

proprietorship was the norm, when compared to peasants in eastern UP, especially in Gorakhpur division where tenancy was widespread, was noted by Singh as evidence. As Singh observed:

The peasant proprietor of the former area walks erect and will look you in the face, whereas the tenant of the latter lacks self-confidence and does not feel himself your equal.⁴⁴³

Fourth, Singh believed that peasant proprietors tended to make better use of cooperatives, especially in credit, than tenants. Referring to the British government's Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation's *Interim Report* (1923),⁴⁴⁴ Singh argued that credit cooperatives had been more successful in Germany than in England because the former country has a greater population of peasant proprietors who could use their holdings as guarantees for loans. Finally, Singh believed that peasant proprietorship would foster legal equality among the broad mass of UP's people which would be more conducive to a democratic society than the existing *zamindari* system of landlords and tenants, which encouraged 'oligarchy', or collective farming arrangements, which encouraged centralised state-control and 'totalitarianism'.⁴⁴⁵

Moreover, Singh argued that small farms were economically advantageous over large ones, roughly a decade before Ranga made somewhat similar arguments (see chapter 3), as they limited machinery use and employed more manual labour.⁴⁴⁶ To this point, Singh attached an array of data from Western, Central and Eastern Europe. Likewise, Singh cited a 1913 submission to the German Agricultural Council showing that production declines as farm size increases.⁴⁴⁷

Additionally, Singh highlighted that small peasant-run farms enabled more intensive production by using more cattle per acre and avoided hiring harvest labourers by relying on family labour, as noted by economist Doreen Warriner (1904-72).⁴⁴⁸ To Singh, the small family farm was also more ecologically sustainable than the large farm due to their use of manure, rather than fertilisers, which maintained soil fertility in the long term. Therefore, he argued that

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁴⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, 134-5.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 132-5.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 137-8.

⁴⁴⁸ Cited in *ibid.*, 139n3.

the small family farm should stay as the cornerstone of rural society, all tenants should become proprietors, and larger farms should be dismantled.⁴⁴⁹

Overall, Singh summarised his case for peasant proprietorship with a quote from Ion Mihalache (1882-1963), the former Romanian Minister of Agriculture for the Peasant Party (1918-1926).⁴⁵⁰ In 1920, 'Peasant [*sic*] Proprietary', Mihalache declared, 'is a natural ideal for any country which is still far from industrialised ... before coming to that distant Socialist heaven ... the country must first pass under the Sign of the Peasant.'⁴⁵¹

Rather than simply expressing his agreement with Mihalache, Singh's real purpose in quoting him was to aid his response to Indian socialist critiques of peasant proprietorship. Referring to a 1936 pamphlet by the socialist leader J. P. Narayan,⁴⁵² who was involved in Sahajanand's BPKS (see chapter 2), Singh countered Narayan's claim that peasant proprietorship weakened the state and economy by arguing that, as in Europe, it could coexist with heavy industry, support strong militaries, ensure rural prosperity, and regulate agriculture through taxation.

Narayan was not, however, a serious threat, as he wasn't on the ZAC committee and collectivisation wasn't a serious policy in India around 1947 - not even backed by the CPI. Still, Singh ended by citing support from figures like J.B. Kripalani (see chapter 3) for peasant proprietorship.⁴⁵³

Following the publication of the ZAC's Report in 1948,⁴⁵⁴ Pant entrusted Singh with drawing up a bill to bring about *zamindari* abolition.⁴⁵⁵ Thus, he was able to make a decisive contribution to the shape of *zamindari* abolition in the face of unnamed critics who had:

[V]ehemently propagated ... that it [the Congress government] was an inefficient regime ... [and had] taken an unduly long time to formulate its proposals.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 137-40.

⁴⁵⁰ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania* (Oxford, 1994), 325, 507-8.

⁴⁵¹ Quoted in Singh, *Abolition*, 153.

⁴⁵² Cited in *ibid.*, 154n12.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 153-4, 156.

⁴⁵⁴ *Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee*, 2 Vols. (Allahabad, 1948).

⁴⁵⁵ 'Interview', 99-100.

⁴⁵⁶ Singh, 'Abolition of Zamindari in U.P.', 2ff.

Approved by the UP cabinet in June 1949, the bill aimed to replace the existing system of land rights and tenancy arrangements with the creation of two broad types of property rights:

bhumidhari and *sirdari*.⁴⁵⁷ The only difference between the two was that the former had the right to sell their lands, among other benefits, and paid lower land revenue upon receipt of a one-off payment,⁴⁵⁸ which Singh strongly encouraged all tenants, who were able, to do.⁴⁵⁹

Furthermore, the bill sought to provide generous compensation to ex-*zamindars* following the removal of their rights to collect taxes on lands they did not cultivate.⁴⁶⁰ In 1947, Singh had endorsed such an idea by appealing to the authority of the doctor and Labour politician Viscount Christopher Addison (1869-1951),⁴⁶¹ arguing that expropriating land without compensation could set a dangerous precedent, potentially justifying the seizure of all private property - mines, factories, homes, and money. He warned this could spark a violent revolution and alienate both the wealthy and supporters of private property who otherwise favoured rural prosperity.⁴⁶²

In the same vein, Singh also, like Sahajanand despite the fact that he ultimately advocated *zamindari* abolition without compensation (see chapter 2), referred to the 1935 Government of India Act, which would, in due course, come to considerably underpin the Indian Constitution of 1950,⁴⁶³ to emphasise that expropriating landlords without compensation was not possible on account of it.⁴⁶⁴ Singh also rejected arguments even from Gandhi that *zamindari* abolition could proceed without compensating former *zamindars*, as the Mahatma had suggested in a 1942 interview with American journalist Louis Fischer (1896-1970).⁴⁶⁵ This was perhaps slightly unfair especially that in 1949, Singh acknowledged that Gandhi had changed his views by this point.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁵⁷ Reeves, 'Zamindari', 161.

⁴⁵⁸ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 88.

⁴⁵⁹ Charan Singh, 'Why Should the Kisan Become a Bhumidhar?', Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., II, S. No. 30, 1-2.

⁴⁶⁰ Reeves, 'Zamindari', 163.

⁴⁶¹ Cited in Singh, *Abolition*, 163n1.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 163.

⁴⁶³ Rohit De, *A People's Constitution* (Princeton, 2018), 7-8.

⁴⁶⁴ Singh, *Abolition*, 165.

⁴⁶⁵ Cited in ibid., 164n2; cf. 'Interview with Louis Fischer', [1942], *CWMSG*, vol. 76, 437.

⁴⁶⁶ Singh, 'Abolition of Zamindari in U.P.', 5.

Singh's support for *zamindari* abolition with compensation therefore ensured former *zamindars* kept the lands they personally cultivated, while tenants and sub-tenants gained legal rights to secure tenancy.⁴⁶⁷

With the passage of the *UP-Zamindari Abolition Act* in 1950,⁴⁶⁸ Singh had therefore won the argument and had succeeded in introducing the system of peasant proprietorship into UP that he craved, which he later described as amounting to an 'agrarian revolution'.⁴⁶⁹ Notwithstanding this, the changes were in practice rather moderate. Indeed, Singh's reforms, which to reiterate did not dispossess *zamindars* of the land legally recognised as belonging to them and provided them with compensation for the loss of their right to collect taxes on lands which did not belong to them, meant, among other factors, that many ex-*zamindars* were able to maintain control over large estates well into post-colonial India.⁴⁷⁰

Although, at the same time, altering the structure of landholding in UP, i.e. by equalising landholdings, was not the main aim of the legislation. As Singh made clear in 1972:

We wanted to make that person the owner, the man who actually tilled the soil ... Now no third party could intervene and eject him ... Being the owner, he could make improvements ... sink a well in it ... he can do what he wants ... When he was a tenant, he did not manure the land well, did not dig wells, nor did he irrigate because he was afraid - he did not know when the land would be lost to him.⁴⁷¹

By 1950, Singh had therefore established a fundamental 'agrarian populist' policy approach to land reform - designed to make small peasants in the countryside, and not big capitalist farms and/or socialist farms as a 'liberal' or 'socialist' might desire. Furthermore, he had not just theorised about it or agitated for it but had played a crucial role in implementing it in UP, exhibiting an 'agrarian populist' policy towards achieving change through constitutional and parliamentary means too.

⁴⁶⁷ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 88.

⁴⁶⁸ *Agricultural Legislation*, vol. 4, 228-329.

⁴⁶⁹ Charan Singh, *Agrarian Revolution in Uttar Pradesh* (Lucknow, 1958), 42.

⁴⁷⁰ W. C. Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India* (New Haven, 1962), 240-56; Thomas R. Metcalf, 'Landlords Without Land', *Pacific Affairs (PA)*, 40 (1967), 5-18; Elizabeth Whitcombe, 'Whatever Happened to the Zamindars?' in E. J. Hobsbawm et al. (eds.), *Peasants in History* (Calcutta, 1980), 156-80.

⁴⁷¹ 'Interview', 101.

Even so, Singh's 'agrarian populist' policy positions remained unfulfilled as his views regarding cooperatives had been hinted at, mostly via critical comments regarding Soviet agricultural policy in the 1930s, although they mostly remained undeveloped and were thus not completely clear. The transformation of the debate on rural reform from the abolition of landlordism to new methods of agricultural production, as noted in chapter 3, in the 1950s provided Singh with ample opportunity to do this.

II: 'Economic Progress through Agricultural Production': The Crisis of Nehruvian Planning and Singh's Vision of Development, c.1956-64

This section analyses Singh's economic thought within debates about cooperative farming as a solution to India's developmental problems. It argues that Singh's developmental vision emerged from his opposition to cooperative farms and preference for peasant proprietorship, based on his questioning of cooperative farming's purported ability to increase production and facilitate rapid industrialisation. While Singh supported long-term industrialisation to address Indian poverty and provide employment for the landless, agricultural development remained his priority - specifically increased production by small family farms and developing rural savings through small-scale industries. Singh articulated these arguments both in objective economic terms and because of their subjective consistency with his 'agrarian populist' beliefs, although they were expressed in rather technocratic, rationalist terms here contrasting strongly with his blistering 'peasant' vs 'urban elite' political rhetoric after he left Congress in 1967 (see section III), confirming his commitment to peasant proprietorship while making it somewhat more inclusive to other rural groups.

At the Nagpur session of 10 January 1959, Congress formally committed itself to introduce land ceilings on agricultural property and cooperative farms on acquired lands,⁴⁷² as noted in chapter 3 on Ranga/Swatantra. In the internal Congress debate on the proposals, Singh was the most outspoken critic.⁴⁷³ While he said that he did not oppose re-distributing land from large

⁴⁷² *Co-operative Farming*, 3-4ff.

⁴⁷³ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 117.

holders to the landless, and the UP government of which he was a part did pass a Land Ceilings Act in 1960 albeit with a relatively high ceiling of 40 acres per family of five,⁴⁷⁴ although not as high as the 50 acre ceiling proposed by Sahajanand in 1949, he believed that the government should pursue this policy by taxing those owning very large landholdings, incentivising them to reduce the size of their farms, rather than by direct confiscation which, he said, was unpopular.

On the issue of cooperative farms, however, Singh expressed complete disagreement with arguments that they would increase agricultural production, yet he did not reject them entirely like Sahajanand and Ranga (see chapters 2-3) as we will soon see. Nonetheless, Singh posited that bar the exceptional case of Israel, cooperative farms, in China especially, led to unproductive collective farms and communes.⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, Singh also thought that the proponents of cooperative farms, including Nehru himself, failed to appreciate that:

[I]n spite of all scientific advances, man's mind still moved in that narrow groove in which it was moving two thousand years ago. If the right of ownership was abolished immediately, the farmer would not join the cooperative at all; if the right remained, the farmers would run the cooperative for one or two seasons, but then would try to get out of it. If it was assumed that the cultivator was not such a selfish creature and would fully support the cooperative way of farming, he would become a 'sanyasi' and would not remain a cultivator.⁴⁷⁶

Singh claimed that his views on this issue was the key cause of his departure from his then posts of Revenue and Finance Minister in the UP cabinet.⁴⁷⁷ According to Singh, when Nehru visited Lucknow on 2 March, he had told the Prime Minister that he had reservations about the leadership of the state by the then Chief Minister Sampurnanand (1891-1969).⁴⁷⁸ Following a long and acrimonious relationship which began with Singh's sacking from the UP-Agriculture ministry in 1954,⁴⁷⁹ Singh had concluded that Sampurnanand was simply 'incapable of giving a clean and efficient administration to the State.'⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 89, 115-20.

⁴⁷⁵ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 117-18.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge, 2004), ch.5; Sampurnanand, *Memories and Reflections* (London, 1962), ch. 20.

⁴⁷⁹ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 126.

⁴⁸⁰ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 120-1.

Thus, in a lengthy follow-up letter to Nehru of 13 March, Singh accused Sampurnanand of complete ignorance of the workings of village-level government and of being more interested in ‘astrology, space travel, flying saucers and Badrinath’⁴⁸¹ among other charges.⁴⁸² Singh’s purpose in documenting the defects of his Chief Minister was presumably to prod Nehru into dismissing Sampurnanand.⁴⁸³ Hence, his conclusion of the letter with a threat to walk if action was not taken against him.⁴⁸⁴

Singh’s gambit, however, backfired. Nehru replied with a firm defence of Sampurnanand, on 21 March, writing that:

We function in a country which ... is socially and economically backward ... [and] writing about his or any other person’s good points and failings ... does not help much.⁴⁸⁵

Singh, caught stranded by Nehru, responded on 3 April that he ‘felt that the dice was loaded against him owing to his views on certain questions’.⁴⁸⁶ Nehru replied to deny that the cooperative farming issue affected his stance ‘though *it may be that unconsciously it created an impression*’.⁴⁸⁷ This phrasing was later used by Singh to prove that it was his ‘audacity in opposing ... [Nehru’s] pet scheme of cooperative farming’ that his resignation was ultimately accepted.⁴⁸⁸

Singh’s opposition to cooperative farming can be traced at least as far back to a 1952 speech he gave that was published as ‘Co-operative and Collective Farming’ that year.⁴⁸⁹ Singh began this speech with a statement that ‘the phrase cooperative farming’ was ‘capable of being interpreted in two different ways’ i.e. as a:

[S]ystem under which kisans keep their holdings separate and derive and utilise income from these holdings as separate entities but act jointly as a single organisation or unit in matters like the marketing of produce, purchase of seed, manure, and other requirements, borrowing and

⁴⁸¹ Temple.

⁴⁸² Quoted in Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 489.

⁴⁸³ Singh, *Land Reforms*, 121.

⁴⁸⁴ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 490.

⁴⁸⁵ Quoted in Singh, *Land Reforms*, 121.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴⁸⁷ Quoted in *ibid.* Emphasis original.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 122-3.

⁴⁸⁹ Charan Singh, ‘Co-operative and Collective Farming’, (1952), Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., II, S. No. 47, 5; cf. Singh, *Abolition*, 245-52.

lending, purchase maintenance and use of heavy implements and provision of irrigation facilities.⁴⁹⁰

As context, cooperatives of this kind, had been practised under British direction in UP in the late colonial period.⁴⁹¹ The second sense in which Singh understood cooperatives, moreover, was a system where there is:

[N]o room for separate holdings ... [and] all kisans taking part in cooperative farming hav[ing] to obliterate the boundaries of their respective holdings in order to merge them into one big farm and have to carry on all work relating to the farm in accordance with directions from a committee elected by themselves or from its office bearers ... [which] differs little from collective farming.⁴⁹²

Thus, while Singh did recognise some small differences between the cooperative farm of the second type and the collective farm,⁴⁹³ he nevertheless objected to the creation of more 'large farms', of any type, in India above all because:

It has been observed that large farms, whether they are privately owned by a single individual or family or are worked on a cooperative or collective basis, do not yield more per 'bigha' than do the smaller ones.⁴⁹⁴

This led Singh to repeat his argument, first made in the context of his writings on *zamindari* abolition especially in 1939 and 1947, discussed in the previous section, that small farms were more productive larger farms in terms of yield:⁴⁹⁵

The reason is obvious. Like the human child or the young or an animal, agriculture and the plants we cultivate need a good deal of care and there is a limit to the amount of care which any human being can bestow. It is not difficult to see, therefore, why countries like China, Japan, Belgium, Denmark and Germany, which have small ... [farms], produce more per acre than America and Australia where big farms are the rule.⁴⁹⁶

While Singh made several further arguments against 'large farms' and especially 'collective farms', including their requirements for machinery which, to him, simply lead to rural unemployment and the conversion of the 'kisan' into a 'labourer' - he also made a more positive point. Like

⁴⁹⁰ Singh, 'Co-operative and Collective Farming', 5.

⁴⁹¹ Eleanor Margaret Hough, *The Co-operative Movement in India* (London, 1932), 51-2.

⁴⁹² Singh, 'Co-operative and Collective Farming', 5.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

Ranga (see chapter 3), Singh argued that cooperatives should be deployed only in ‘services’ rather than ‘production’, especially ‘for purposes of marketing, etc’:

As a matter of fact, it is proper irrigation, good seed and good manure that make for increase in agricultural production ... If the small farmers also manage, through cooperation, to obtain them, all arguments against the existence of small holdings will lose their force ...⁴⁹⁷

Hence Singh concluded that ‘what we should all strive after is cooperative farming of the first type’ while cooperative farms of the second type, he argued in line with Ranga (see chapter 3), should only be conducted on an ‘experimental’ basis, as had also been attempted in late colonial Bihar (see chapter 2).⁴⁹⁸ Furthermore, Singh argued for vigorous efforts to consolidate landholdings in UP, since many smaller peasants owned tiny, non-contiguous land fragments that weren’t being utilised as intensively as possible.⁴⁹⁹ Indeed, as the UP Revenue Minister, he had made great efforts to help implement a legislative act passed by the UP government to facilitate this in 1953.⁵⁰⁰

Nevertheless, in 1956, Singh was forced to return to the issue of cooperative farming in a detailed pamphlet on the subject given that, despite his views and the opposition of Ranga (see chapter 3), the Planning Commission, which had just published its Second Five Year Plan, had developed a strong interest in them (see chapter 3). In this text, Singh began by asserting that post *zamindari* abolition the debate on agricultural reform was changing towards the question of whether the nation should adopt an ‘economy of large cooperative farms’ instead of ‘peasant farming’.⁵⁰¹ While doing this, he made clear his awareness that Indian policymakers were looking to the example of cooperative and collective farms in Russia, and particularly China, at this time (see chapter 3).⁵⁰² Thus, he offered a forceful argument that cooperative farming was ‘psychologically wrong’ because the farmer’s:

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 108-115.

⁵⁰¹ Singh, *Whither*, v.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

[I]nterest will be subordinated to the group interest; he will have to submit to the control and direction of the group management. Even if the right to secede at will is preserved in theory, in practice it will nearly always be found that the seceder cannot be given back his land, for such restoration will be detrimental to group interests; he will have to be content with its money equivalent. The forces released by zamindari abolition will suffer a reaction, and one should in consequence expect a fall in production.⁵⁰³

To substantiate these points, Singh conducted a careful analysis of cooperative farming in Soviet Russia, Mexico, Israel and China,⁵⁰⁴ with his account of the first three based on a 1951 article by Henrik F. Infield (1901-70),⁵⁰⁵ then Executive Director of the American Rural Settlement Institute.⁵⁰⁶ In so doing, Singh defined the Russian *kolkhoz*⁵⁰⁷ as being established:

[W]hen several peasants living in the same area decide ... to socialize their “basic means of production”, i.e. labour, soil, draught beasts ... while keeping their individual homes, a small garden, a few livestock, poultry and the like, for themselves.⁵⁰⁸

The Mexican *ejido*, meanwhile, Singh regarded as a ‘sub-type of the Kolkhoz’ and formed when

[A]t least twenty eligible males ... form a group which petitions the Government for land ... the allotted land is given to the group in common possession [and] the members ... decide whether they want to divide it up and work it individually, or ... collectively.⁵⁰⁹

To Singh, what the *kolkhoz* and *ejido* had in common was that they were both brought into being by the state. The Israeli *kvutza* (or *kibbutz*), by contrast, ‘grew out of the spontaneous decisions’ of its members. In the *kvutza*, Singh wrote, people cooperate in work, consumption, and social life, contributing according to their abilities and taking what they need from shared resources. Thus, they represented: ‘the most complete form of communism, in the non-political sense of the word’.⁵¹⁰ By contrast, in the Israeli *moshav*, Singh noted the land is leased as a collective for forty-nine years and broken into smaller farms of varying sizes - from four to forty acres - based on the type of crops or farming practiced.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰³ Ibid., v-vi.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁰⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰⁶ Henrik F. Infield, *Cooperative Living in Palestine* (New York, 1948), frontmatter, xi.

⁵⁰⁷ A type of collective farm.

⁵⁰⁸ Singh, *W/hither*, 5.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 6, 10.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 12.

Finally, Singh noted a range of organisations in China by referring to the Indian government's own *Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agricultural Planning & Techniques* (1956),⁵¹² including the agricultural producer cooperative,:

[I]n which members pool their land as shares and there is unified management and ... communally owned property.⁵¹³

Following this, Singh cited recent arguments in India, especially from the government committees supervised by the Planning Commission's Panel on Land Reforms,⁵¹⁴ that *moshav* or Chinese style agricultural producer cooperatives had the potential to benefit the development of Indian agriculture.⁵¹⁵ The essential claim, according to Singh, was that they represented a middle-ground between large-scale capitalist and collectivist farming (of the *kolkhoz* variety) by protecting property rights while allowing for the deployment of machinery in agriculture, which would generate agricultural surpluses and free up rural labour for industrial projects.⁵¹⁶ Such arguments, Singh thought, were spurious and reflected the biases of city-based bureaucrats who thought that agriculture worked on the same principles as industrial manufacturing.⁵¹⁷

In opposition to this line, Singh re-asserted his argument that small farms worked by peasant proprietors and their families were more productive than larger cooperative, or collective farms using the same key point deployed in his 1952 article regarding the importance of human care in tending to a farm's crops. Indeed, as Singh elaborated in this pamphlet, hired labourers on large farms were unlikely to work with the same enthusiasm as small family farmers because they 'work for wages, not for love'.⁵¹⁸ Therefore, 'large-scale undertakings dependent on paid labourers cannot ... compete with peasant production in a free market'.⁵¹⁹ Labourers, ultimately, would also, Singh insisted, be less incentivised to work hard when compared to peasant

⁵¹² Cited in *ibid.*, 13.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, 17.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*; cf. *Report of the Committees of the Panel on Land Reforms*, 176-82ff.

⁵¹⁶ Singh, *Whither*, 5, 17.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

proprietors because the produce would be divided between a much larger number of workers, possibly in the hundreds, which would be counter-productive for achieving growth in the agricultural sector.

Furthermore, in this piece, Singh also offered much more evidence to his key argument that smaller farms were more productive than larger ones.⁵²⁰ For example, he included secondary data from American, English, Scandinavian and Swiss agriculture.⁵²¹ Simultaneously, Singh appealed to the authority of the Romanian historian and political theorist David Mitrany (1888-1975),⁵²² and Warriner once again,⁵²³ to argue that agricultural yields were higher in 1930s Eastern Europe, particularly in Czechoslovakia, where small farms were widespread, than in Soviet Russia after collectivisation. In so doing, Singh noted that in 1952, the Soviet Union reorganised its collective farms downward from 2.6 million to 91,000, which raised the average farm size to 5,230 acres. Although Singh also noted that the Soviet government was undertaking a massive campaign to increase cultivated area, importing wheat from Canada to address Eastern European deficits, and that Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971) had issued critical remarks about the country's state and collective farms at the Siberian Farmers' conference of July 1955. Thus, 'large farms do not mean large production'.⁵²⁴ Finally, Singh criticised the Indian government's recent delegation to China,⁵²⁵ for being too quick to accept unreliable statistics that purported to show increased per acre yields of crops after the introduction of cooperative farming in the country in 1949.⁵²⁶

While an argument about an 'inverse relationship' between farm size and agricultural productivity was therefore at the heart of Singh's arguments against cooperative and collective farms, he also objected on non-economic grounds too. First of all, given 56% of India's population were landholders in 1951, a figure which he probably took from the 1951 Census,

⁵²⁰ Singh, *Whither*, 39-52; cf. idem, 'Co-operative and Collective Farming', 5; idem, *Abolition*, 95-6.

⁵²¹ Cited in Singh, *Whither*, 39-41.

⁵²² Cited in *ibid.*, 44.

⁵²³ Cited in *ibid.*, 45.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-5.

⁵²⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, 50.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-2.

although his source is unclear,⁵²⁷ Singh believed that it was simply impractical for the Indian government, committed to democratic principles, to expropriate many millions of people to facilitate the establishment of cooperative farms, in turn showing that his ‘agrarian populist’ stance on democratic principles remained unwavering, as Ram, Sahajanand and Ranga all ultimately accepted too (see chapters 1-3).

Furthermore, Singh argued that Indian policymakers should not be seeking to emulate the Russian *kolkhoz* in any sense because its genesis was uniquely Russian in that it emerged in a land with unusual traditions of collective land ownership through the village commune, which did not exist in India in the same manner, citing the authority of G. D. H. Cole to support his position,⁵²⁸ a figure who had also influenced Ranga (see chapter 3). On the contrary, in India, Singh claimed that ‘individual possession, even, in large parts, individual ownership, has a very long history and is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the peasantry’.⁵²⁹ It is notable in this respect, moreover, that like Chhotu Ram, who had made a similar case by appealing to the *Manusmṛiti* (see chapter 1), a text that Sahajanand was also interested in but in a different context (see chapter 2), while Ranga appealed to it via the *dharmashastra* (see chapter 3), Singh had argued, in a manner theoretically compatible with the above argument, in *Abolition* (1947) that, in ancient India:

The law was laid down thus by the sage Jaimini,⁵³⁰ in his Pūrva Mīmāṃsā (VI.7.3): - “The king cannot give away the earth because it is not his exclusive property, but is common to all beings enjoying the fruits of their own labour on it. It belongs to all alike”. Śābara Swami⁵³¹ commenting on this passage says:- “The king cannot make a gift of his kingdom, for it is not his as he is entitled only to a share of the produce by reason of his affording protection to his subjects.”⁵³²

Thus, according to Singh, the monarch claimed a share of his subjects’ land profits not as a landlord collecting rent, but as payment for providing protection and covering the shared

⁵²⁷ Cf. *Census of India*, 1951, vol. 1, Part II-C (New Delhi, 1954), 1-25.

⁵²⁸ Cited in Singh, *Whither*, 101.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵³⁰ The founder of the *Mīmāṃsā* (hermeneutic) school of Hindu philosophy.

⁵³¹ This appears to be a reference to Śābara Swami, the author of an important commentary on the text.

⁵³² Singh, *Abolition*, 6; cf. Mohan Lal Sandal (trans.), *The Mīmāṃsā Sūtras of Jaimini* [200 BCE] (Allahabad, 1923), 390-1; Sir Ganganatha Jha (trans.), *Shābara-Bhāṣya* [Śābara’s Commentary], vol. 2 [200 CE] (Baroda, 1934), 1347-8; Davis, *Law*, 47; Francis X. Clooney, *Thinking Ritually* (Vienna, 1990), 19-20.

expenses of running the community. So, Singh insisted, he only over-rode the rights of peasant cultivators beyond this ‘whenever the holder failed to cultivate the land or to cultivate it properly’,⁵³³ an argument which, he argued, could also be found in other ancient texts like the *Arthashastra*⁵³⁴ and the *Manusmriti*,⁵³⁵ connections which had also been made by Ranga in 1949.⁵³⁶

The point of such references, moreover, was to show that in ancient India, which he described as largely a ‘country of small holders or peasant proprietors’,⁵³⁷ that those who worked the land had ownership rights although Singh also acknowledged the existence of ancient landlords, especially Brahmins, who he also felt had a duty to cultivate for their community’s benefit - a principle he saw reflected in the Weimar Constitution,⁵³⁸ article 155 of which proclaimed ‘the cultivation and exploitation of the soil is a duty of the landowner towards the community.’⁵³⁹

In *Whither Co-operative Farming* (1956), Singh further developed his case against large cooperative and collective farms by noting peasant resistance to forced collectivisation in Russia, Yugoslavia, and Eastern Europe. Regarding China - more relevant to India given Chinese policy influence on India’s Planning Commission - Singh observed that considerable ‘ruthlessness’ had been used by Chinese Communists to force peasants into cooperative farms against their will. Even in Israel, where cooperative farms had been historically popular and relatively successful, Singh noted rising demand for individual provision. Thus, Singh concluded that any suggestion Indians would readily submit to large cooperative farms was ‘utopian.’⁵⁴⁰

Beyond the rejection of the government’s initiatives to introduce more cooperative farms, Singh’s *Whither Co-operative Farming* (1956) is also interesting for its ringing endorsement of the re-

⁵³³ Cf. Byres, ‘Charan Singh’, 172-3.

⁵³⁴ *The Science of Wealth/Power*.

⁵³⁵ Cited in Singh, *Abolition*, 7ns2-4; cf. Olivelle, *Manu*, 141ff; idem (trans.), *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India* [3rd Century BCE to 3rd Century CE] (Oxford, 2013), 99-100ff, 199-201; Misra, ‘Indian Machiavelli’, 314-15ff.

⁵³⁶ Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, 21-2.

⁵³⁷ Singh, *Abolition*, 9.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁵³⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁴⁰ Singh, *Whither*, 100-8.

distribution of land to the landless. Indeed, Singh was specifically opposed to the policy of using acquired land to establish cooperative farms. Furthermore, it also shows that Singh was opposed to large-scale capitalist farming as well as socialised farming.⁵⁴¹ After all, the logic of his view, which he used to oppose cooperative holdings, that small farms were more productive than large farms in terms of output per acre implied this.

From this perspective, Singh therefore argued that land redistribution should proceed on the principle that:

[N]one shall be allowed to possess an area of land which ... is beyond the capacity of an average peasant ... and ... less than an area below which it will not produce more per acre.⁵⁴²

The specific figures Singh mentioned were a maximum of 25 acres and minimum of 3.125 acres, the former being a similar amount Sahajanand judged a peasant family of five with less than 10 acres should be able to receive (see chapter 2). Beyond that, he called for:

The land held in excess of 25 acres ... to be acquired by the state and made available for re-distribution among displaced tenants, landless labourers and uneconomic cultivators.⁵⁴³

In his second major work *Joint Farming X-Rayed* (1959), moreover, Singh maintained and elaborated this argument.⁵⁴⁴ Although his points were virtually identical to those arguments made by him in 1956.⁵⁴⁵ But he did make his most trenchant case hitherto here that a flourishing individual small peasant proprietor was essential for the success of Indian democracy. As Singh argued:

The liberty of the worker ... varies inversely with the size of the undertaking in or upon which he is employed. An economy of large private farms or capitalist farming envisages a rural scene where the number of persons who will give the orders, *viz.* the farm-owners or managers, will be very few and the number of those who will carry out these orders, *viz.* labourers, will be very large ... In such an economy of large undertakings a few will get the whip-hand, who will develop ... an imperious attitude hostile to equality and freedom and who will gradually come to dominate the political life and the administration. While the vast

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 4, 85.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 86.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁴⁴ Charan Singh, *Joint Farming X-Rayed* (Bombay, 1959), 89-92.

⁵⁴⁵ Singh, *Whither*, 85-7.

majority, accustomed always to receive and obey orders, free though nominally, will not count either in social life or counsels of the States and the Union.⁵⁴⁶

The references, moreover, to ‘equality’ and liberty’ reflect, as noted in the introduction regarding Eastern European ‘agrarian populism’, that, in India too, ‘agrarian populism’ as an ideology essentially existed within a space between ‘liberalism’ and ‘socialism’ as an economy of small farms worked primarily by peasant proprietors and their families is neither predominately capitalist nor socialist. Indeed, the achievement of such an economy, Singh argued in 1947, should be the culmination of Indian development, its ‘ideal economy.’⁵⁴⁷

Furthermore, in *Joint Farming* (1959), Singh’s underlying economic premise underpinning this argument, that small farms were more productive than large farms, was backed up with new Indian evidence provided courtesy of Singh’s contemporary Congress agrarian dissident N. G. Ranga.⁵⁴⁸ Furthermore, Singh suggested a different ideal range for the farm size of between 6.25 acres to 60 acres ‘for an average family land-holding’ although one with at least ‘2.5 men-equivalents’ working the farm ‘at maximum intensity.’⁵⁴⁹

More surprisingly, however, Singh then conceded that cooperative and collective farms were a better bet in terms of securing the equitable distribution of Indian wealth, when compared to an economy of small farms, a key goal of Indian development by his own admission, but with the caveat that economic gradations remained on the Soviet collective farm, which, he said, included:

[N]ine classes of workers ... ranging from the president, senior tractor-drivers, etc., who are credited with two to five labour-days for each day actually on duty to watchmen, cleaners, etc., who score only half a labour day for every day on duty.⁵⁵⁰

This observation led Singh to now think far more about finding solutions to the ‘entire economic problem’ of Indian poverty.⁵⁵¹ Specifically, Singh considered five responses:

⁵⁴⁶ Singh, *Joint Farming*, 94.

⁵⁴⁷ Singh, *Abolition*, 154.

⁵⁴⁸ Ranga and Paruchuri, *Co-operative Farming* cited in Singh, *Joint Farming*, 34n1, 35.

⁵⁴⁹ Singh, *Joint Farming*, 91.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 92.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 129.

[R]eclamation and redistribution of land, emigration to foreign countries, development of non-agricultural resources, intensive utilisation of ... land resources and population control.⁵⁵²

Of these potential policies, the first, Singh argued, was unlikely to help much given that only a quarter of India's 58 million acres of wasteland would be able to be converted for agricultural usage in the foreseeable future. But re-distributing land would be more promising if the government gave permanent land rights to tenants, introduced a high progressive tax on lands under personal cultivation or possession and a ceiling of 12.5 acres was established for landholdings per adult and his family. In this scheme:

[L]and surplus to what a person may efficiently cultivate will get distributed automatically, that is, without the State coming into the picture at all.⁵⁵³

An additional perk, moreover, was that the Indian state would not have to pay compensation to large landlords,⁵⁵⁴ a bane of 'Indian 'agrarian populists' since Sahajanand (see chapter 2). But the real benefit of land re-distribution if achieved in this manner was that it would happen:

[W]ithout having 'unleashed a class conflict', as the State 'Communist Party, Uttar Pradesh, in its meeting of April 20-21, 1959, held at Lucknow gleefully says, the Nagpur Resolution ... has done.⁵⁵⁵

Thus, while land re-distribution was 'theoretically sound', Singh recast his point, first made in 1958, that steps must be taken to ensure that the total number of agriculturalists in India did not increase on account of land re-distribution.⁵⁵⁶

What was new at this stage was Singh's attachment to this point - that not everybody should become a small peasant proprietor - a critique of Vinoba Bhave's *bhoodan* movement for implying that 'our economic problem will be solved the day everybody gets a patch of land'. Singh argued that 'development of a country means gradual decrease in the percentage of its population which is engaged in agriculture, and corresponding increase in the percentage which is engaged in non-

⁵⁵² Ibid., 130.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 131-6.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 137.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 136.

agricultural occupations'.⁵⁵⁷ Land secured for redistribution should therefore go to 'sub-basic holders' rather than the landless, as the latter should move into industry including 'trade, transport and other non-agricultural' roles. Clearly Singh's ideal of peasant proprietorship was not to be bestowed upon everyone, and the peasantry to him, like to Ram, Sahajanand and Ranga, were the real 'people' of India (see chapters 1-3).

Furthermore, like land reclamation, Singh did not see much scope for emigration, for the purposes of population reduction, to play a part in India's developmental efforts given that he made clear his awareness, citing the American demographer Kingsley Davis (1908-1997), that emigration from India had in fact declined since 1930.⁵⁵⁸

By contrast, Singh's fourth policy option of intensively using land resources was at the heart of matters. As Singh argued, 'labour intensive' (small-scale, rural), rather than 'capital intensive' (heavy, urban), industries should be the driving force of growth.⁵⁵⁹ While Singh admitted that the former would not generate as much wealth as the latter, what they would do, Singh argued, is provide badly needed employment to the Indian people:⁵⁶⁰

If modern technology cannot be reached to the villagers just today, this does not mean that in the meanwhile large-scale mechanised industry in urban centres should continue to multiply and the villagers kept under-employed and unemployed. It will be suicidal and must mean certain death to millions of India's population, if the solar power stored in the 400 millions of her inhabitants is allowed to run to waste while an attempt to replace it with steam, electricity or such other power is being made. We would, therefore, do well to keep our people employed even with the charkha, the handloom and other hand-driven implements rather than let them eat out their hearts in unemployment.⁵⁶¹

Symbolised by his reference to the *charkha*, Singh's argument here took on a distinctly 'Gandhian' tone and was supported by quotes from the Gandhian economist and philosopher Richard Gregg (1885-1974).⁵⁶² However, it was also backed up by abundant empirical data which was characteristic of Singh's style by this point. Drawing on the Indian Ministry of Commerce and

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Cited in *ibid.*, 137.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 197.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 197-8.

⁵⁶² Cited in *ibid.*, 198.

Industry's own *Report of the Textile Enquiry Committee* (1954),⁵⁶³ Singh claimed that the 'employment potential in the handloom industry is ... twenty times what it is in the mill industry.'⁵⁶⁴

In this vein, Singh also cited the example of Japan with its small landholdings and great success in raising the standard of living of farmers through Government initiatives to promote small-scale and handicraft industries in the country. Specifically, Singh singled out Japanese shoe production where shoe soles are made:

[I]n one workshop, ... the heels ... in another hundreds of miles away and the upper cover ... in a third, and for these three parts to be assembled in a fourth place.⁵⁶⁵

Also, in Switzerland:

[M]any separate village families make wheels or other parts of watches which are assembled in the big factories and go to make the famous Swiss watches.⁵⁶⁶

Industries operating according to this model, Singh argued, would save capital and increase rural savings, investment patterns and possibly even cooperative enterprises at the village level.

Increased rural purchasing power would also allow for better educational, medical and social provision.⁵⁶⁷ As Singh imagined:

An economy of cottage and small-scale decentralised units will avoid congestion of population and social disintegration which might result from movement or transference of rural workers to urban areas.⁵⁶⁸

Crucially, Singh also believed that small-scale rural industries would also reduce unnecessary transportation and lower distribution expenses would make amenities more affordable for rural communities and help prevent disputes between workers and employers.⁵⁶⁹ Singh was therefore sold on the idea, which Ram, Sahajanand and Singh had also advocated (see chapters 1-3), that

⁵⁶³ *Report of the Textile Enquiry Committee* (New Delhi, 1954), 55.

⁵⁶⁴ Singh, *Joint Farming*, 200.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 209-10.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

‘cottage or handicraft industries’ were the most likely solution to India’s ‘epidemic of unemployment’. But Singh also realised that these industries needed state protection from competition from large-scale industry and those working in handicrafts and small industries would have to establish cooperatives, of the service variety of course, to provide themselves not just with credit but to procure equipment, raw materials, and to market their products.⁵⁷⁰

Apart from the positive benefits of small-scale industries for employment potential vis-à-vis large industries, Singh also advocated for their development out of an awareness that the huge size of the Indian population at this time, approximately 435 million in 1959,⁵⁷¹ was a profound restriction to industrial growth. Singh explored this point more extensively in *India’s Poverty and its Solution* (1964), a revised and expanded edition of his second book.⁵⁷² As Singh made clear:

Because more men under given conditions will produce a greater amount of food from the same area than fewer men, and men must have food ... they will continue to stick to land rather than move to factories. People leave agriculture and take to manufacturing when food is not only available for all, but is cheaper than manufactured goods ... So, in a crowded land the scantiness of food - which results from diminishing returns in agriculture - tends to prevent manufacturing ...⁵⁷³

The consequence of this low land to man ratio when combined with the fact that India was then only able to produce food to a level bordering on subsistence, Singh explained, is that peasants do not have a product to sell. A lack of food in the market therefore meant that Indians were unable to move into other professions and had become trapped in agriculture. To escape this conundrum, Singh argued that if there was to be any industrial development, India would first require a ‘revolution in agricultural production’.⁵⁷⁴ This barrier to growth meant, Singh argued that:

[A]griculture, at least immediately, is more important than industry - more important than giant steel or hydro-electric projects and heavy or producer goods industries.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 211, 218-19.

⁵⁷¹ ‘Indian Population’, *Macrotrends*, <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/IND/india/population> (Accessed 09/11/25).

⁵⁷² Singh, *Solution*, xv.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 360.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 360-1.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 398.

Although he also made it clear that industrialisation per se was not objectionable but instead that because

[M]an does not live by industrial goods ... only a grudging concession to the role of agriculture that our economic planners and political leaders usually make, will not do.⁵⁷⁶

As Singh elaborated further:

[I]ndustrialisation that we seek will come about not as an indirect but a direct consequence of agricultural prosperity ... Nor, as we have already seen, will industrialisation, if by it is meant only or largely heavy or mechanised industry, be able to solve our unemployment problem. And inasmuch as agriculture directly occupies more than 70 per cent of the workers and will always remain the most important source of employment and income - it will be a fortunate day, indeed, when the percentage comes down to 50. Without improvement in the output of agriculture there will be no general rise in living standards even if there were rapid progress in other sectors.⁵⁷⁷

To increase agricultural production, therefore, Singh argued for more government investment in irrigation, fertilisers, improved seeds, insecticides/pesticides and transport in rural areas.⁵⁷⁸ He also placed renewed stress on the need for landholdings to be consolidated, as the holdings of many proprietors remained divided into tiny plots spread out across a village,⁵⁷⁹ as discussed earlier. Cooperatives should also be established, Singh added, to provide services ranging from credit to storing produce to insuring property.⁵⁸⁰ These kinds of cooperatives, Singh insisted, protected 'the identity both of the farm and the farmer', unlike the dangerous cooperative farm, and had proven their worth among the farmers of Europe.⁵⁸¹

In essence, therefore, alongside increased education and a family planning programme to keep the nation's population growth under control, Singh's pitch for Indian development and poverty reduction was essentially agricultural and rural in its immediate orientation and priorities.⁵⁸²

Singh's developmental vision was not completely original as the Swatantra Party, (see chapter 3), had been making similar arguments in the 1950s. Even M. R. Masani, who was associated

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 414-34.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 437-9.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 442.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 450.

⁵⁸² Ibid., 513-14.

with the Tata corporation had absorbed ‘agrarian populist’ policies on cottage industries, cooperatives, etc, as endorsed by Ram, Sahajanand and Ranga (see chapters 1-3) given that he wrote in 1964 that Indian development policy should focus on ‘land, irrigation, fertilizers, seeds, roads, credit and floor prices’ with ‘heavy industry’ at ‘the bottom of the list’.⁵⁸³ In fact, on 18 February 1959, Masani forwarded a copy of a highly critical speech he had made in the Lok Sabha on the Indian government’s cooperative farming proposals to Singh, underlining that the latter would ‘notice there is a reference to you in it’.⁵⁸⁴ Also, Singh cited Swatantra Party leader C. Rajagopalachari to argue for India to produce its own food rather than rely on foreign imports,⁵⁸⁵ with the latter also praising the former for the stand he took in opposition to the Nagpur resolution.⁵⁸⁶

Nevertheless, Singh’s 1964 text was perhaps the clearest, most accomplished and undiluted ‘agrarian populist’ statement of this perspective, especially given its highly ambitious attempt to provide a detailed policy alternative to Nehruvian developmentalism.⁵⁸⁷

III: ‘The Gandhian Blueprint’: Singh, Congress Politics and the People’s Parties, c.1964-80

This section examines the impact of Singh’s ‘agrarian populist’ thought on post-Nehruvian Indian politics (1964-80). The section argues that while Singh ultimately introduced policies advancing his ‘agrarian populist’ developmental agenda, pursued at the highest government levels through his skilful strengthening of opposition forces following Indira Gandhi’s turbulent rise to power, his most important contribution came as a by-product of his role in restoring full democratic government in India after Indira Gandhi’s 1975-77 experiment in dictatorship. Ironically, it was Indira Gandhi’s party who reaped the short-term rewards, revealing the barriers to channelling ‘agrarian populist’ policies through the parliamentary arena.

⁵⁸³ M. R. Masani, ‘The Food Crisis’, *Freedom First*, September 1964, 1-3.

⁵⁸⁴ M. R. Masani to Charan Singh, 18 February 1959, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., I, S. No. 28, 51.

⁵⁸⁵ Cited in Singh, *Solution*, 365n2.

⁵⁸⁶ C. Rajagopalachari, ‘New Superstitions for Old’, *Swarajya*, 10 October 1959.

⁵⁸⁷ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 13-14; idem, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 274.

Following a period of isolation after his resignation from Sampurnanand's government, Singh returned to the UP government under the Chief Ministership of C. B. Gupta in 1960. While Singh and Gupta had collaborated in their efforts to undermine Sampurnanand,⁵⁸⁸ the latter essentially represented opposite political positions to the former due to Gupta's broad support of the heavy industries planned development agenda advocated by the Nehruvian regime.⁵⁸⁹

Consequently, Singh and Gupta were never likely to work well in government together not least because the latter saw the former as a potential threat to the stability of his government. So, while Gupta appointed Singh to the senior cabinet position of home minister, and restored him as head of the agriculture ministry, he attempted to keep Singh in check by encroaching on his political independence and curtailing the patronage powers of his ministries.⁵⁹⁰

In 1962, Singh therefore came to blows with Gupta over his efforts, at the behest of the Planning Commission which was trying to collect more resources to finance the Third Five-Year Plan (see chapter 3), to introduce a 50% surcharge on land revenue in UP. Firing off the first shot, Singh wrote to Gupta with a firm rejection of the policy on account, he claimed, of a lack of growth in rural per capita incomes in UP over the previous thirteen years.⁵⁹¹ Even so, Singh stated that even if rural incomes had increased:

[I]t will be a mistaken policy to mop it up and ... reduce the purchasing power of the peasantry to the minimum ... [because] if the masses have little or no purchasing power, non-agricultural occupations in the State will not spring up or prosper.⁵⁹²

As an alternative to the proposed taxes, Singh therefore, in the spirit of Ram during the Great Depression in Punjab (see chapter 1), called for the:

[S]lashing some of our uneconomic schemes and exploration of measures of economy rather than increase in taxation.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁸ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 2, 164-71.

⁵⁸⁹ C. B. Gupta, *Autobiography* (Lucknow, 2003), 96ff.

⁵⁹⁰ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 383ff; idem, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 2, 171, 173-98, 204.

⁵⁹¹ Charan Singh to C. B. Gupta (n.d.), Charan Singh Papers, PMML, Ist. Inst., I, S. No. 34, 1.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 2.

After some back and forth between them and others, Gupta, in a reply to Singh of July 1962, eventually seized on the contradiction in Singh's argument that peasants could not afford to be taxed more while at the same time asserting that 'as a lesser evil ... a campaign should be started for acquisition of Bhumidhari rights by Sirdars'. Thus, Gupta sensed insincerity in Singh's position when he inferred that:

If the Sirdar can pay the additional levy there is no reason as to why the Bhumidharis cannot pay ... due to the lower land revenue per acre on ... [them] their taxable capacity is greater than that of the Sirdars.⁵⁹⁴

Thus, Gupta concluded:

Equity, therefore, demands that the land holding households who have been the largest beneficiaries of Zamindari Abolition ... should be required to pay more than what they have been paying by way of taxes so far ... [to ensure] sufficient resources for planned development.⁵⁹⁵

Fortunately, given the increasing heat of these exchanges, which led Singh to consider resigning from the State Council of Ministers in September,⁵⁹⁶ a compromise was reached in October 1962 when it was agreed that the surcharge would be reduced to 25% and the smallest landholders would not have to pay, only after the Chinese invaded India, prompting the Sino-Indian War of 1962, that had a colossal impact on the Indian public finances.⁵⁹⁷

After the eventual collapse of Gupta's government in 1963 following a revolt of his rivals within the UP Congress,⁵⁹⁸ Singh got into an even more serious dispute with his successor as Chief Minister Sucheta Kripalani (1908-74).⁵⁹⁹ Writing to Kripalani on 19 November 1963, Singh raged at what he regarded to be the hitherto failure of the UP government, and the central government, to raise agricultural production. In precise terms, Singh attributed this failure to the government's division of responsibility for agriculture among various departments. Specifically,

⁵⁹⁴ C. B. Gupta to Charan Singh, 26 July 1962, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., S. No. 34, 17-18.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁹⁶ Charan Singh to C. B. Gupta, 16 September 1962, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, I Inst., S. No. 34, 105 - 'not issued.'

⁵⁹⁷ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 130; cf. Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (Bombay, 1970), 257-414.

⁵⁹⁸ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 2, 201-230.

⁵⁹⁹ Sucheta Kripalani, *An Unfinished Autobiography* (Ahmedabad, 1978), 67-9, 213-27.

Singh was referring to the irrigation, community development, cane development, and fruit development departments.⁶⁰⁰ Elsewhere, he also threw revenue into the mix. Thus, to facilitate increased production, Singh argued that said departments should be merged under the purview of the agriculture minister or the Chief Minister.⁶⁰¹

After Kripalani's failure to act on his proposal, Singh asked her to remove him from the agriculture ministry on 9 February 1964.⁶⁰² In May 1964, Singh further angered Kripalani by sending her a copy of a speech he gave in March, claiming that since G. B. Pant's departure in 1954, UP had focused on developing heavy industry at the expense of agriculture, which employed 74% of the population.⁶⁰³ The UP Congress leadership, Singh charged, did not appreciate that 'a prosperous agriculture' was a requirement for industrial development and, in any case, 'while agriculture stagnated, industry too has not developed.'⁶⁰⁴

Singh's arguments were essentially justified given that, at the time he was writing, c. May 1964, the Indian government had largely failed to achieve a significant increase in agricultural production. It is important to note, however, that by the end of the month, Nehru had breathed his last and his replacement L. B. Shastri, (see chapter 3), did give agriculture a greater priority in the government's developmental efforts. The ultimate solution was adopted by the Indian government under both Shastri, c. 1964-6 and Indira Gandhi, c. 1966-8, when it, spurred on by the outbreak of famine in Bihar in 1966 which risked spreading beyond this state,⁶⁰⁵ introduced a 'New Agricultural Strategy',⁶⁰⁶ premised on deploying new technologies with American aid, such as new high yielding seed varieties, specially of wheat and rice, and fertilisers, administrative

⁶⁰⁰ Charan Singh to Sucheta Kripalani, 19 November 1963, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, II Inst., II, S. No. 30, 15a-16, 30d.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 16-17.

⁶⁰² Charan Singh to Sucheta Kripalani, 9 February 1964, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, II Inst., II, S. No. 30, 15a.

⁶⁰³ Charan Singh, 'Causes of Our Low Agricultural Production', 11 March 1964, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, II Inst., II, S. No. 30, 44; idem to Sucheta Kripalani, 7 May 1964, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, II Inst., II, S. No. 110, 7.

⁶⁰⁴ Singh, 'Agricultural Production', 44.

⁶⁰⁵ Paul R. Brass, 'The Political Uses of Crisis', *JAS*, 45, 2 (1986), 245-67.

⁶⁰⁶ C. Subramaniam, *The New Strategy in Indian Agriculture* (New Delhi, 1979), 1-21.

reform and price incentives.⁶⁰⁷ Its prized result was India's 'Green Revolution',⁶⁰⁸ which dramatically increased agricultural production so that India became self-sufficient in food, and which also resulted in Chhotu Ram's Haryana⁶⁰⁹ state,⁶¹⁰ Ranga's coastal Andhra region,⁶¹¹ and Singh's own backyard of Meerut in western Uttar Pradesh,⁶¹² among other pockets of the Indian countryside, becoming highly prosperous agricultural areas.

While sources concerning Singh's views of the 'New Agricultural Strategy' are limited, his February 1963 address at a 'Workshop on Agricultural Universities' at Uttar Pradesh Agricultural University - India's first agricultural university founded in 1960 with American aid to increase agricultural production amid faltering rural growth rates and experiment with new technologies including seeds later used during the 'Green Revolution' - strongly suggests he would have been very critical of such an approach.

Indeed, in this speech, Singh expressed profound scepticism of what he saw as foreign or externally imposed development models. Singh cautioned that while it was acceptable to learn from other countries, India must remain attentive to its own unique circumstances. He argued that technical or expert-driven solutions should reflect India's reality - specifically, the country's abundance of labour and limited capital. Singh also pointed out that Indian youth generally had a resigned or pessimistic view of rural life, and that there was a lack of strong leadership emerging in rural areas. Thus, while Singh appreciated the assistance provided by the United States, he placed higher value on support that would help raise awareness and understanding among the public. Indeed, his broader stance was rooted in his belief in a farming system based on small, family-run holdings, the use of simple technologies, and a vision of India focused on agriculture.

⁶⁰⁷ *Agricultural Development* (New Delhi, 1965), 1-14; Frankel, *Political Economy*, 276ff; Varshney, *Development*, 48-80.

⁶⁰⁸ Francine Frankel, *India's Green Revolution* (Princeton, 1971), 12-190; Christopher J. Baker, 'Frogs and Farmers', in Tim Bayliss-Smith and Sudhir Wanmali (eds.), *Understanding Green Revolutions* (Cambridge, 1984), 37-52; Raj Patel, 'The Long Green Revolution', *JPS*, 40, 1 (2013), 1-63; Siegel, *Hungry Nation*, 183-219.

⁶⁰⁹ Formed in 1966 following a linguistic based re-organisation of Punjab.

⁶¹⁰ R. B. Singh, 'Environmental Consequences of Agricultural Development', *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment*, 82, 1 (2000), 97-103.

⁶¹¹ Carol Boyack Upadhyaya, 'The Farmer-Capitalists of Coastal Andhra Pradesh', *EPW*, 23, 27 (1988), 1376-1382.

⁶¹² C. Jeffrey, 'Richer Farmers and Agrarian Change in Meerut District', *Environment and Planning, A*, 29, 12 (1997), 2113-2127.

In his view, industrial development should proceed gradually - from small to medium and only then to large-scale industry if necessary - rather than prioritising an industrialised society that merely uses agriculture as a support base.⁶¹³ This view therefore contrasts with the Indian government's developmental strategy at the time and coheres with Singh's writings from the 1950s/60s.

Back in 1964, meanwhile, Singh's dispute with Kripalani was cranked up a further notch when, at a time of serious food shortages in UP and the country as a whole, Singh refused to carry out an instruction from his Chief Minister to head a committee on the government's anti-hoarding measures.⁶¹⁴ Frustrated with Singh's intransigence, Kripalani wrote to Prime Minister Shastri on 10 August, where she attributed Singh's general opposition to anti-hoarding measures on his partiality to the 'vested interest of the more affluent kisans.'⁶¹⁵

Eventually, following an increasingly bitter correspondence and Singh's continued criticism of the anti-hoarding measures,⁶¹⁶ Kripalani removed Singh from his post as agriculture minister in May 1965.⁶¹⁷ His request regarding removal having been granted notwithstanding, Singh continued to quarrel with Kripalani thereafter over issues of transfers and postings of local self-government personnel all the way up to the general and state elections of January 1967.⁶¹⁸

Following a severe reduction of Congress' majority in the Lok Sabha and the total loss of the party's majority in the UP assembly at the 1967 election, powered by widespread discontent following Indira Gandhi's forced devaluation of the rupee in 1967, nationalist sentiment in the wake of the 1962 war with China and the Indo-Pak War over Kashmir in 1965 plus more effective than normal campaigning from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Jana Sangh⁶¹⁹ (BJS) and

⁶¹³ Prakash Kumar, *A History of India's Green Revolution* (Cambridge, 2025), 148-58.

⁶¹⁴ Sucheta Kripalani to Charan Singh, 12 August 1964, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, II Inst., II, S. No. 110, 53.

⁶¹⁵ Quoted in Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 2, 255.

⁶¹⁶ Charan Singh to Sucheta Kripalani, 20 August 1964, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, II Inst., II, S. No. 110, 61-3; idem to idem, 23 August 1964, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, II Inst., II, S. No. 110, 64.

⁶¹⁷ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 2, 258.

⁶¹⁸ Charan Singh to Sucheta Kripalani, 8 January 1967, Charan Singh Papers, PMML, II Inst., II, S. No. 110, 154-7.

⁶¹⁹ Indian People's Organisation.

Samyukta Socialist Party⁶²⁰ (SSP) in particular,⁶²¹ Kripalani resigned as Chief Minister.⁶²² Gupta stepped into the vacuum and attempted to build a Congress majority with the support of independent MLAs, which included seventeen 'Congress rebels'.⁶²³ The opposition parties, meanwhile, were negotiating a merger to build a majority of their own.

In the middle lay Singh who was considering whether to serve under Gupta or to quit Congress and bring his supporters into alliance with the opposition parties, which would bring them over the threshold for a majority. But, despite it not yet having a secure majority in the house, the state governor asked Gupta, given that Congress was the largest party in the assembly, to form a government.⁶²⁴

At this point, Singh declined an offer to serve under Gupta following disagreements about the appointments to his cabinet,⁶²⁵ resigning from Congress to become head of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal⁶²⁶ (SVD),⁶²⁷ which was composed of his own supporters (now known as the People's Congress),⁶²⁸ and the assembly's various opposition parties ranging across the political spectrum from the far-left to the far-right.⁶²⁹

Having achieved a clear legislative majority, Singh thus became Chief Minister of UP on 3 April 1967 at the helm of the state's first ever non-Congress government.⁶³⁰ Unfortunately, however, Singh was unable to implement much of his policy agenda for Indian development to the benefit of his base among the state's peasant proprietors. Despite this, Singh did secure agreement from his coalition partners on the need to address shortages of winter (*rabi*) crops

⁶²⁰ United Socialist Party.

⁶²¹ Frankel, *Political Economy*, 298ff; cf. B. D. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics* (Cambridge, 1990), 247-9; Lewis P. Fickett, Jr., 'The Major Socialist Parties of India in the 1967 Election', *AS*, 8, 6 (1968), 489-98; Boris Niclas Tölle, *The Socialist Opposition in Nehruvian India* (Frankfurt am Main, 2015), 208-9.

⁶²² Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 2, 366-7.

⁶²³ Gupta, *Autobiography*, 266-71.

⁶²⁴ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 3-4, 6.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6, 29.

⁶²⁶ United Legislator's Party.

⁶²⁷ 'Charan Singh's Opportunity', *The Hindustan Times*, 5 April 1967.

⁶²⁸ 'Jan Congress Draft Constitution, 1967', *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/Jan%20Congress%20Draft%20Constitution%2C%201967.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁶²⁹ Kashyap, *Defection*, 143ff.

⁶³⁰ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 6.

through a levy on producers and to abolish land and building tax.⁶³¹ However, the government could not agree on any other areas of policy and collapsed within a year. Thus, as *The Hindu* reported on 25 February 1968, ‘what has long been anticipated has come to pass in Uttar Pradesh with the exit of [sic] the eight-party coalition Ministry under Mr. Charan Singh and the irreparable disruption of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal that preceded it.’⁶³²

After his resignation as Chief Minister on 17 February 1968,⁶³³ Singh confessed that the SVD had failed to deliver much. But he still declared that his opposition to Congress would continue through the People’s Congress, which was now re-named as the Bharatiya Kranti Dal⁶³⁴ (BKD),⁶³⁵ which went on to perform unexpectedly well at UP’s 1969 midterm elections. Securing 21.3% of the vote and 98 seats, his party was particularly successful in western UP, where it received more than one-third of the vote, drawing strength from Singh’s following among Jat peasants and other ‘backward castes’ owning between 2.5 and 30 acres of land, and from where it produced half of its MLAs.⁶³⁶

Intended initially as a national party,⁶³⁷ in its election manifesto, the BKD promised to ‘save’ India by ‘treading ... the path that Gandhi showed us’ while expressing belief in ‘hard work, integrity and sacrifice on the part of all the citizens of the country’. Its 25-point list of ‘aims and principles’ included an assertion that the party stood for creating an economy of ‘small farms and handicrafts or small industries of low-capital intensity’ because such institutions would increase agricultural production, provide plentiful rural employment, reduce rural inequality, and ‘avoid

⁶³¹ Ibid., 9.

⁶³² ‘And Now Uttar Pradesh?’, *The Hindu*, 25 February 1968.

⁶³³ ‘CCS Resigns as CM, 17 February 1968’, *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/CCS%20resigns%20as%20CM%2C%2017%20February%2C%201968.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁶³⁴ Indian Revolution Party.

⁶³⁵ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 16, 23-5, 29.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 49; cf. idem, ‘The Politicization of the Peasantry in a North Indian State’, *JPS*, 7, 4 (1980), 395-423; Ian Duncan, ‘Party Politics and the North Indian Peasantry’, *JPS*, 16, 1 (1988), 40-1ff.

⁶³⁷ Michael H. Johnson, ‘The Relation Between Land Settlement and Party Politics in Uttar Pradesh’, (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 1975), 245-6.

exploitation of man by man ..., as economic exploitation leads to political exploitation and militates against democracy.⁶³⁸

The BKD's programme was, therefore, clearly 'agrarian populist' in the sense of showcasing a commitment to land reform, cooperatives and democracy as the latter statement was accompanied by a reassertion of Singh's view that there should be a floor and a ceiling on the size of the farm, now 2.5 and 27.5 acres respectively. Furthermore, the manifesto also proposed that the 'small farms and industries ... will be linked together by the principle of cooperation ... as an instrument of satisfaction or fulfilment of a common need of theirs.'⁶³⁹

Nevertheless, and despite the BKD's strong electoral performance, Congress remained the dominant party in the state with 211 seats. This meant that, with the support of independent MLAs and the Swatantra Party, Gupta was able to return once again as UP's Chief Minister after the elections.⁶⁴⁰

Gupta's third, and final government would, however, soon fall victim to the consequences of the Congress split of 1969, which followed intense conflict in the central Congress party between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her rivals opposed to her socialist programme, especially her proposed constitutional reforms in order to challenge the constitutional right to property which was opposed by political conservatives both within and outside Congress.⁶⁴¹

The implication of the split for UP Congress politics came about after the leading state Congressmen Kamalapati Tripathi (1905-1990), and his following of sixteen ministers plus, resigned from Gupta's government to join Indira's new Congress (R) party.⁶⁴² As a result, Gupta, who had sided with Indira's opponents, now known as Congress (O), was forced to resign on 10

⁶³⁸ 'BKD's Election Manifesto', (1968), Charan Singh Papers, PMML, II Inst., II, S. No. 186, 22-4.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 24-5, 29.

⁶⁴⁰ Gupta, *Autobiography*, 286ff.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 343ff; Frankel, *Political Economy*, 290, 388-433, 439ff, 464ff.

⁶⁴² Kamalapati Tripathi, *Freedom Movement and Afterwards* (Varanasi, 1989), 170ff.

February 1970 once it had become clear that he had lost his majority and had not secured sufficient support for his government from the opposition.⁶⁴³

As the leader of the second largest party in the UP assembly, the Congress split put Singh in a very strong negotiating position. After reaching an understanding with Tripathi and Congress (R) on 14 February, which involved the BKD being permitted to solely form the state government and Tripathi's party giving full support to it in the UP legislature alongside an ambiguous understanding that Congress (R) would join the government 'when the two parties feel that they have come closer in course of working together',⁶⁴⁴ Singh began his second stint as Chief Minister of UP on 17 January 1970. What is more, his personal influence can be seen in the coalition's policy agreement, which declared that 'all measures shall be taken to increase agricultural production.'⁶⁴⁵

However, as in 1967-8, Singh achieved very little during his second stint as Chief Minister of UP. By Singh's own account, his major 'achievements' included a clampdown on a 'land grab movement', which successfully secured the arrest of the eminent Communist leader S. A. Dange (1899-1991) and stopped the agitation at source. Furthermore, Singh built cabinet consensus on adopting an ordinance ensuring equal treatment for people arrested at political rallies. Also, he succeeded in prohibiting mandatory enrolment in university student unions and getting a strike of electricity workers reigned in after three days.⁶⁴⁶ None of these measures, however, were relevant to the implementation of his developmentalist policy agenda for the benefit of agriculture and the peasantry.

⁶⁴³ 'Gupta-Singh Correspondence, February 1970', *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/Gupta-Singh%20Correspondence%2C%20February%201970.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁶⁴⁴ Charan Singh, *The Story of New Congress-BKD Relations* (Lucknow, 1970), 1-2.

⁶⁴⁵ 'CCS-Tripathi Joint Statement on Congress-BKD Alliance', *Charan Singh Archives*, https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/CCS-Tripathi%20joint%20statement%20on%20Congress-BKD%20alliance_%20February%2016%2C%201970.pdf, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁶⁴⁶ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 64; cf. 'Charan Singh Gets Into Stride', *The Overseas Hindustan Times*, 25 April 1970.

In any event, the BKD-Congress (R) coalition government was always going to be short-lived.⁶⁴⁷ From the outset, Singh was put under immense pressure by Indira Gandhi to merge the BKD with Congress (R), which became especially intense in June,⁶⁴⁸ accept policies to which he was opposed such as, *inter alia*, the nationalisation of UP's sugar industry,⁶⁴⁹ and ultimately to allow the establishment of a Coordination Committee, headed by Tripathi, which Singh suspected he would use to interfere in bureaucratic appointments. Indeed, Singh had a history of conflict with Tripathi, which went back to the 1950s, which included attempts by Singh to gather evidence of Tripathi's family and their involvement in a corruption scandal concerning the construction of the Sharda Sagar dam in central UP.⁶⁵⁰ In fact, alongside Gupta, Tripathi had been Singh's main opponent in the UP Congress.⁶⁵¹

Cooperation between the two parties dramatically broke down, however, when Singh instructed BKD members of the Rajya Sabha on 5 September 1970 to vote against Indira Gandhi's key leftist policy of abolishing the privy purses of the India's former princely families,⁶⁵² which temporarily defeated it. Singh argued that the measure broke a promise made by Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel following independence and seemed to presage the abolition of private property rights, which were fundamental to democratic life. Singh also regarded the issue to be largely symbolic given that payments to the princes cost the state very little compared to tax evasion by 'big Capitalists and industrialists' - a figure worth '180 times the amount of the privy purse' - which he charged Indira Gandhi with allowing to continue.⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁷ Singh, *Story*, 2ff.

⁶⁴⁸ 'Letter to Indira Gandhi', (1970), *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/Letter%20to%20Indira%20Gandhi%2C%20June%201970%20on%20Congress-BKD%20relations%20and%20a%20possible%20merger.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁶⁴⁹ 'CM Charan Singh Responds to Critics on Sugar Mill Nationalisation, Preventative Detention Act etc', (1970), *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/CM%20Charan%20Singh%20responds%20to%20critics%20on%20sugar%20mill%20nationalisation%2C%20Preventative%20Detention%20Act%20etc%2C%20August%201970.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25); cf. Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 87-98.

⁶⁵⁰ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 63-4, 254-69.

⁶⁵¹ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 29.

⁶⁵² Katherine Frank, *Indira* (London, 2001), 323; cf. Raghavan, *Indira*, 51, 61, 90.

⁶⁵³ Singh, *Story*, 16, 19, 24.

The Prime Minister's allies, however, were not impressed with Singh taking the side of 'reactionary' interests and Tripathi swiftly withdrew support from Singh's government on 24 September 1970.⁶⁵⁴ Singh was then ordered to resign as Chief Minister by the UP governor, likely at the behest of Indira Gandhi herself.⁶⁵⁵ But Congress (R) did not have the numbers to form a single-party government in UP, so another SVD ministry, this time including Gupta's Congress (O), was established on 18 October 1970 with T. N. Singh (1904-1982) as Chief Minister.⁶⁵⁶

UP politics was then transformed anew following Indira Gandhi's stunning victory at the national elections of March 1971. Indira's promise of radical social and economic change, itself a form of 'populism' that appealed to the rural poor and urban working class and which appears to have been devised very much in response to the success of Singh's BKD and also to defeat the various other opposition parties including Swatantra (see chapter 3) and the Hindu nationalist BJS,⁶⁵⁷ among others, accompanied with the compelling slogan *garibi hatao*,⁶⁵⁸ secured 43% of the vote and 350 seats in the Lok Sabha.⁶⁵⁹ Within a month, T.N. Singh's government's collapsed and Tripathi attracted enough support among UP legislators to establish a Congress (R) government, securing Indira Gandhi's control over UP politics.

In response, Singh became leader of the opposition in the UP assembly. From c.1971-3, he mounted countless attacks on the Tripathi's government's corruption and incompetence. For instance, Singh accused Tripathi of associating 'with criminals' and of being a casteist given his appointment of significant numbers from his own (Brahmin) caste to his government. In a

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 24-5ff; cf. 'Charan Singh Retorts', *The Indian Express*, 16 September 1970; Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 65n22.

⁶⁵⁵ Singh, *Story*, 27-8; cf. 'Rift in BKD-Congress Coalition Complete', *The National Herald*, 25 September 1970; 'Letter to President VV Giri Asking him to Delay the Proclamation of President's Rule', (1970), *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/Letter%20to%20President%20VV%20Giri%20asking%20him%20to%20delay%20the%20proclamation%20of%20President%E2%80%99s%20rule%2C%20October%202.%201970.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25); Raghavan, *Indira*, 65.

⁶⁵⁶ 'T. N. Singh S. V. D Leader Unanimous Choice By 5 Parties', (1970), *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/CCS%20gives%20up%20CMship%20for%20TN%20Singh%2C%20October%2C%201970.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁶⁵⁷ Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 53-93.

⁶⁵⁸ Eradicate poverty.

⁶⁵⁹ Myron Weiner, 'The 1971 Elections and the Indian Party System', *AS*, 11, 12 (1971), 1153; cf. Frankel, *Political Economy*, 385-7, 454-6ff; Corbridge and Harriss, *India*, 67-74; Misra, *VCT*, 323-4; Guha, *India*, 445-6ff.

speech of 27 July 1971, Singh also attacked him on policy grounds, specifically the continuing favouritism shown to heavy industries in the state's development policy vis-à-vis agriculture, his policies towards the 'issue of licences, permits, and quotas' and the 'disparities in incomes' between urban and rural India.⁶⁶⁰

Tripathi's government, however, ultimately fell in 1973 following the outbreak of a serious revolt among UP's Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC). Following uprisings and desertions in Varanasi, Kanpur and at Lucknow University, the central government had to send the military in to restore order. Apparently caught unaware by the seriousness of grievances within the PAC regarding the status of their union, Indira Gandhi forced him to resign in disgrace in June 1973. Then, after a period of President's Rule, she selected H. N. Bahuguna (1919-1989) to be the new Chief Minister and lead Congress (R) into the UP-state elections of 1974.⁶⁶¹

In the 1974 UP elections, Congress just about held on to its majority in the UP assembly having won 215 seats. The BKD, meanwhile, won 105 seats having boosted its strength following a pre-election merger with the Swatantra Party,⁶⁶² which had been achieved after several rounds of negotiations commencing in 1968,⁶⁶³ which N. G. Ranga had been involved with at one point before his departure from Swatantra in 1972.⁶⁶⁴ Indeed, while Ranga appears to have made a calculation that rejoining Congress would likely be fruitful as the strength of his rivals among the Reddys had declined in the Andhra Congress and Swatantra had completely failed to displace Congress from power in the state by this date,⁶⁶⁵ alongside some ideological sympathy for Indira Gandhi's agenda (see chapter 3), Hooda suggests he ultimately accepted

⁶⁶⁰ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 99-101.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 110, 111-19, 154.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 154, 161.

⁶⁶³ 'Rajagopalachari-CCS Correspondence on a National Union of Parties', (1968), *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/Rajagopalachari-CCS%20correspondence%20on%20a%20national%20union%20of%20parties%2C%20July%2C%201968.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁶⁶⁴ 'CCS Letter to N. G. Ranga on Charges Against Him Levelled by the Jan Sangh', (1969), *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/CCS%20letter%20to%20N.G.%20Ranga%20on%20charges%20against%20him%20levelled%20by%20the%20Jan%20Sangh%2C%2012%20June%2C%201969.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁶⁶⁵ Weiner, *Party Building*, 155-6; Rasam, *Swatantra*, 156; K. C. Suri, 'Democratic Process and Electoral Politics in Andhra Pradesh', <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/2690.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25), 18-19, 73.

Singh as a national leader for Indian peasants despite his new found closeness to Indira Gandhi after Swatantra.⁶⁶⁶

Regarding the Congress (R) victory in the 1974 UP elections, moreover, Singh claimed it had been achieved despite:

[A] BBC broadcast on the eve of the elections that forecast the BKD getting a minimum of 200 out of the 425 seats in the ... legislature with the best chance of forming a government ... [which was obfuscated by] large-scale rigging on an unprecedented scale by the ruling Congress party and the government machinery.⁶⁶⁷

Thus, in his unfinished and unpublished book, 'The Rise and Fall of the Janata Party' (1984-5), Singh claims that this was the key moment when he realised that if democracy was going to 'survive' in India, the BKD would need to unite all of India's 'democratic opposition parties' because he was now certain that if Congress was not removed from central government, defeating it regionally would be futile. Hence his call for 'a strong democratic alternative to the Congress at the national level.'⁶⁶⁸

After the 1974 elections, Singh therefore continued to build up the strength of the BKD. Given that it had succeeded in winning the support of the bulk of the SSP, and its base in eastern UP among Kurmis, Yadavs and other 'backward castes', this allowed him to convince the party's members to join his party too. As a result, the BKD was re-named as the Bharatiya Lok Dal⁶⁶⁹ (BLD).⁶⁷⁰

In his Presidential Address at the inauguration of the party in August 1974, a meeting which saw the BKD, Swatantra Party, the SSP and four other minor parties merge into one party and Singh elected as party chairman,⁶⁷¹ Singh insisted that his party would 'strive to be ... a national alternative' to Congress. In so doing, he essentially restated his belief in the BKD's 'agrarian

⁶⁶⁶ R. K. Hooda, *Man of the Masses* (New Delhi, 1979), 33.

⁶⁶⁷ Charan Singh, 'The Rise and Fall of the Janata Party', (1984-5), Charan Singh Papers, PMML, III Inst., III, S. No. 1, 2.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Indian People's Party.

⁶⁷⁰ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 161.

⁶⁷¹ Singh, 'Janata Party', 14.

populist' agenda - namely 'treading the middle, Gandhian path' - in 'creating a society based mainly on self-employment'⁶⁷² and ultimately establishing:

An economy consisting wholly of small independent peasant farms linked by service cooperatives, in the field of agriculture, and mainly of cottage and small-scale enterprises, again served by cooperatives in the field of manufacturing industry ... [because it will] produce more goods, provide more employment, curb income disparities and promote democratic trends.⁶⁷³

The BLD's 'draft statement of policy', moreover, proclaimed its commitment to:

[T]he Gandhian model of socialism as opposed to the Nehruvian model, shifting the emphasis from towns to villages and giving the first priority to agriculture ... [because] wide dispersion of ownership of property and means of production was the only assurance that democracy was safe.⁶⁷⁴

But despite this growing organisation of India's opposition parties, and Singh's claim that the BLD quickly started to 'gain traction' with its advocacy for a united opposition party by early 1975,⁶⁷⁵ he was powerless to build up a strong enough coalition of UP MLAs to displace the Congress (R) from power in the state given its majority in the UP assembly. Thus, Singh started to dabble in some extra-parliamentary opposition by organising a rally of some 20,000 *kisans* from western UP in New Delhi.⁶⁷⁶ However, he was generally reluctant to engage in more serious forms of civil disobedience, such as hunger strikes and *gheraos*,⁶⁷⁷ because he believed these methods were illegitimate forms of opposition in independent India, adopting arguments reminiscent of Chhotu Ram's objections to the Non-Cooperation campaign (see chapter 1).

Indeed, the BKD manifesto of 1968 had stated that because it:

[S]tands for preservation and strengthening of democracy or rule of law ... it does not believe in methods of political agitation and propaganda which are based strictly on Gandhian principles of truth and non-violence ... [including] fast-unto-death ... and civil disobedience, that is, [in] breach of law on a mass scale ... [and] gradually lead to disrespect for law in the minds of the people.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷² Presidential Address by Mr. Charan Singh on the Inauguration of the Bharatiya Lok Dal (New Delhi, 1974), 8, 12.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁷⁴ Singh, 'Janata Party', 14.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 19-20.

⁶⁷⁶ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 161-2.

⁶⁷⁷ A form of workplace-based protest.

⁶⁷⁸ 'BKD's Election Manifesto', 23-4.

Prophetically, as we will see, Singh claimed that such methods represented the ‘surest invitation to chaos and, eventually, to imposition of a dictatorship’.⁶⁷⁹ Thus, a majority government and a loyal opposition allowed UP politics to continue broadly as normal.⁶⁸⁰

In the wider country, however, politics was becoming increasingly unstable as Indira Gandhi struggled to deliver on her promise to ‘get rid of poverty’ considering intractable problems of party organisation, corruption, Supreme Court challenges to her constitutional reform agenda and a slowdown in economic growth following the global oil price shock of 1973-4.⁶⁸¹

Thus, in Gujarat, students at Ahmedabad’s L.D. Engineering College committed arson against the college canteen and assaulted the rector’s house, protesting rising mess bills. Approximately 35% of the college’s students were arrested. The Vidyarthi Lagni Parishad⁶⁸² (VLP) demanded the release of detained students, reduced mess charges, the education minister’s resignation, and a strike affecting all colleges and secondary schools. Students framed their demands within the broader economic context of rising food and essential commodity prices, calling for Gujarat’s ‘hoarders’ and ‘profiteers’ to be arrested. With support from trade unions and opposition parties, particularly Congress (O) and Jana Sangh, Ahmedabad was effectively shut down by the strike on 10 January 1974. As demonstrations turned violent and police suppressed them, the VLP reformed as the Nav Nirman Yuvak Samiti⁶⁸³ to launch a non-violent campaign across the state to dissolve the legislative assembly. Following further demonstrations of popular support and additional violence, this demand was met on 9 February with the imposition of President’s Rule.⁶⁸⁴

In Bihar, moreover, student protests over inflation, shortages, unemployment, and outdated educational content aimed to replicate Gujarat’s movement by demanding the assembly’s

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁸⁰ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 154.

⁶⁸¹ Frankel, *Political Economy*, 473ff and *passim*.

⁶⁸² Student Union Association.

⁶⁸³ Youth Committee for Reconstruction.

⁶⁸⁴ Frankel, *Political Economy*, 524-6; cf. Varsha Bhagat-Ganguly, ‘Revisiting the Nav Nirman Andolan of Gujarat’, *SB*, 63, 1 (2014), 95ff.

dissolution. Led by Jana Sangh and SSP student groups, and backed by the opposition, the protests triggered violence in Patna. Despite this, J.P. Narayan - a reformed 'Gandhian socialist' with a history of radical activism (see chapter 2) and with whom Singh had engaged with intellectually (see section I) - took leadership of the movement.⁶⁸⁵ Under his direction, the 'JP Movement' ground government business in the state to a halt between March and November through a series of mass *bandhs*,⁶⁸⁶ demonstrations and marches.⁶⁸⁷

Unlike in Gujarat, the central government refused the protestors' demands, fearing similar movements across the country, and ordered the mass arrest of protestors. Backed by the security forces, Bihar MLAs felt secure enough to resist popular calls for their resignation. In response, Narayan declared he would develop an all-India movement to defeat Indira Gandhi at the next elections, scheduled for 1976. He also publicly expressed solidarity with Morarji Desai, the Congress (O) leader and Indira Gandhi's chief nemesis within Congress pre-1969, following Desai's decision to go on hunger strike from 7 April 1975 to protest the government's failure to hold elections in Gujarat - his home state - since the assembly's dissolution in February 1974.⁶⁸⁸

Following the formation of a Lok Sangharsh Samiti⁶⁸⁹ composed of the largest opposition parties Congress (O), Jana Sangh, BLD and SSP, and some other smaller parties, which called for a nationwide *satyagraha* campaign to remove Indira Gandhi from power on 25 June,⁶⁹⁰ when combined with news in mid-June of Singh's BLD ally Raj Narain (1917-1986)'s successful lawsuit against Indira Gandhi for misusing state resources during the election campaign in her own constituency during the 1971 elections which implied that she would soon be forced to resign from office,⁶⁹¹ Indira Gandhi advised the President to declare an 'internal emergency' under Article 352 of the constitution to save her premiership. From midnight on 25 June 1975, she

⁶⁸⁵ J. P. Narayan, *Towards Total Revolution* (Bombay, 1978), 55-65 and *passim*.

⁶⁸⁶ Strikes.

⁶⁸⁷ Bipan Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy* (New Delhi, 2003), 38ff.

⁶⁸⁸ Morarji Desai, *The Story of My Life*, vol. 3 (New Delhi, 1979), 1-56; Frankel, *Political Economy*, 528-38.

⁶⁸⁹ People's Struggle Committee.

⁶⁹⁰ Singh, 'Janata Party', 26-7.

⁶⁹¹ Frankel, *Political Economy*, 539ff.

therefore ruled by decree, imposed censorship, and ordered mass arrests - beginning with

Morarji Desai and J.P. Narayan.⁶⁹² Singh, who was also arrested at this time, recounted c.1984-5:

My wife had just left for her village early in the morning of June 26 when the Police came to arrest me. She was to hear the news on her way to the village that all of us had been arrested that day. I was taken to Delhi's Tihar Jail ... There were many other political detainees, including for a brief period Satpal Malik, the young BLD M. L. A. from Uttar Pradesh. That he had been arrested far away and yet he was brought over to Tihar Jail where I was then staying, struck me as somewhat strange.⁶⁹³

Singh, not a stranger to time in prison (see section I), would, however, spend less than a year behind bars, as he was one of the first of India's Emergency-era political prisoners to be released on 7 March 1976.⁶⁹⁴ This development was the source of considerable rumour in opposition circles that he had sold out to the government, an impression Indira Gandhi may have deliberately tried to foster. Furthermore, it is possible that Satpal Malik, Singh's colleague mentioned above, was moved to the Tihar jail so that the Prime Minister could negotiate through him with Singh about a possible merger of the BLD with her party.⁶⁹⁵

Nonetheless, after his release, Singh approached building an opposition coalition among Congress (O), the Jan Sangh, SSP and his own BLD with caution, partly due to his difficult experiences with multi-party coalition government through the SVD in UP from 1967-8. Thus, Singh's condition for joining any unified opposition party was that it must commit to abandoning all forms of illegal actions.⁶⁹⁶

Practically speaking too, Singh's caution was dictated by the fact that many politicians were still in jail - most notably Desai. However, Indira Gandhi's gradual release of political prisoners enabled inter-party talks. On 8 November 1976, Singh promised Narayan the BLD would join a new opposition party if he formed one. After Gandhi ended the Emergency and called elections

⁶⁹² Ibid., 545; cf. Gyan Prakash, *Emergency Chronicles* (Princeton, 2019), 21-2ff; Raghavan, *Indira*, 167ff.

⁶⁹³ Singh, 'Janata Party', 27-8.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., 28-29.

⁶⁹⁵ Christophe Jaffrelot and Pratinav Anil, *India's First Dictatorship* (London, 2020), 390-1.

⁶⁹⁶ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 192, 195-8

on 18 January 1977, the Janata Party was formed the next day at Desai's home, with Desai as chairman, Singh as deputy, and the campaign launched on 30 January.⁶⁹⁷

Despite the Prime Minister's confidence of victory at the 1977 elections, the main reason for why they were called when they were, although it has also been convincingly argued that Indira Gandhi was ultimately a committed and staunchly 'republican' democrat,⁶⁹⁸ her party was removed from power.⁶⁹⁹ Winning a mere 35% of the vote, Congress lost 199 seats in the Lok Sabha. The Janata Party, by contrast, took 43% of the vote and 270 seats, which enabled it to form India's first non-Congress government at the national level under Desai as Prime Minister.⁷⁰⁰

In this context, Singh was preparing his *India's Economic Policy: The Gandhian Blueprint* (1978). The text was aimed directly at the Janata party to elucidate what Singh 'felt should be the party's economic policy'.⁷⁰¹ In so doing, Singh restated his thesis (see section II) that national development policy should be redirected from prioritising industrial over agricultural development - a policy continued by Indira Gandhi during India's Fourth (1969-74) and Fifth (1974-8) Five-Year Plans despite recent faltering in agricultural production, particularly of wheat, after impressive early improvements under the 'New Agricultural Strategy', although the Planning Commission had a far lesser role in directing these initiatives than during her father's heyday (1956-61),⁷⁰² towards small-scale farms, cottage industries and handicrafts.⁷⁰³

Singh's views aligned with a late-1970s resurgence of Gandhian thought that shaped the Janata Party's 1977 agenda. Contributing to its 1977 *Statement on Economic Policy*, he pushed for rural-focused 'Gandhian socialism' over capitalism or communism, stressing decentralisation and self-employment. The policy pledged at least 40% of public investment to agriculture and rural

⁶⁹⁷ Singh, 'Janata Party', 30-79; cf. Brahm Dutt, *Five Headed Monster* (New Delhi, 1978), 72-121; Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 195-8; Rakesh Ankit, 'Janata Party (1974-77)', *History and Sociology of South Asia*, 11, 1 (2017), 41.

⁶⁹⁸ Patrick Clibbens, 'The Indian Emergency', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2014), 241-295.

⁶⁹⁹ Myron Weiner, 'The 1977 Parliamentary Elections in India', *AS*, 17, 7 (1977), 619-626.

⁷⁰⁰ Frankel, *Political Economy*, 570.

⁷⁰¹ Charan Singh, *India's Economic Policy* (New Delhi, 1978), v.

⁷⁰² Frankel, *Political Economy*, 302-35ff, 500-57ff and ch.13.

⁷⁰³ Singh, *Economic Policy*, vi.

development and backed Singh's belief in small, independent peasant farms supported by service cooperatives. Hence its proposals to prepare legislation eliminating persisting middle-layer landholdings and rights in Assam, parts of Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu, close legal loopholes to provide security of tenure to tenants still subject to the ongoing right of the landlord to reclaim the land, especially in Haryana and Punjab, and ensure that the 'major portion of the surplus land and uncultivated government lands available for distribution will be given to landless Scheduled Castes⁷⁰⁴ and Scheduled Tribes⁷⁰⁵ people'. Finally, the document proposed introducing a 'floor on land holdings' and amending 'the law relating to inheritance, transfer and partition of land so that the area of land per farmer or agricultural worker is not reduced below 2.5 acres' - effective only if small-scale industries could develop fast enough to provide jobs for surplus workers as the population increased.⁷⁰⁶

In practice, the Janata Party succeeded in introducing a 'neo-Gandhian' economic policy that moved beyond the centralised industrial growth model of Congress which gave more power to state, local and village administrations, supported small-scale peasant cultivators and craft producers, provided funds for employment schemes, deployed labour-intensive technologies and launched a 'food for work' programmes in an attempt to prioritise labour output over capital output and redistribute personal and national income. However, the snag was that Janata Party leaders interpreted Gandhian ideas differently. Narayan linked Gandhism to socialist job redistribution and replacing party politics with village-based governance. Desai viewed it as personal asceticism, compatible with working with urban businesses. Meanwhile, Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram (1908-1986) saw it as a call for Dalit upliftment.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁴ Dalits (untouchables).

⁷⁰⁵ Adivasis (indigenous communities of India).

⁷⁰⁶ *Statement on Economic Policy* (New Delhi, 1977), 1, 7, 11, 12.

⁷⁰⁷ Rudolph and Rudolph, *Lakshmi*, 163, 166.

Therefore, despite a consensus on Gandhian economics, Singh was initially unable to fully direct the party's economic agenda towards his 'agrarian populist' interpretation of Gandhian economic thought. Revealingly, a Socialist politician who participated in the government later wrote that he did not think that 'Charan Singh had an integrated vision of modern economic development' and described his 'ideas on the agrarian economy' as belonging to the 'pre-Green revolution'.⁷⁰⁸

The main reason for this outcome, however, was Singh's appointment as Union Home Minister in 1977. Although a highly prestigious post, it meant Singh was responsible for the difficult task of holding Indira Gandhi to account for her actions during the Emergency. After all, during the 1977 election campaign, the Janata Party had promised to, in Singh's words, 'prosecute all those, from the highest to the lowest, who were guilty of the Emergency and other crimes'.⁷⁰⁹

As per the task, Singh therefore, who says from the beginning of his tenure that he was 'under tremendous pressure to bring about a speedy fulfilment of this promise' especially from the now Janata Party supporting J. B. Kripalani (see chapter 3),⁷¹⁰ decided to order Indira Gandhi's arrest, after receiving reports detailing 'how huge pay-offs were made to Smt.⁷¹¹ Gandhi ... for securing government contracts', for example in one case where the Government of India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation had inexplicably given a \$17 million government contract to a French consultancy firm when cheaper, alternative providers were available,⁷¹² on suspicion of misusing authority and corruption on 3 October 1977.⁷¹³

Unfortunately for Singh, however, the government's case against Indira Gandhi, who Singh alleges had attempted to brief the 'Manchester Guardian [*sic*] that I as Union Home Minister had

⁷⁰⁸ Madhu Limaye, *Janata Party Experiment*, vol. 2 (New Delhi, 1994), 359-60; cf. Partha Chatterjee, *A Possible India* (New Delhi, 1998), 69-73.

⁷⁰⁹ Singh, 'Janata Party', 111.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 111ff.

⁷¹¹ Mrs.

⁷¹² Singh, 'Janata Party', 115.

⁷¹³ 'October 4, 1977, Forty Years Ago', *The Indian Express*, 4 October 2017.

held a secret meeting with a top Naxalite leader and asked him to arrange for her assassination' while their investigations into her dealings were ongoing, was weak and she was released the following day. Indeed, by Singh's own account, Indira Gandhi had been 'immediately informed' of the decision to arrest her by her 'sources within the government' and thus she swiftly organised to make a '*Tamasha*'⁷¹⁴ out of it with the backing of the 'monopoly press, the big industrialists', among other groups.⁷¹⁵ Singh also claimed that he had been, at this time, 'shocked' by the fact that when the former Prime Minister had appeared in court, during the morning after her arrest, the following had happened:

[T]he ... investigating officer neither asked the Court for her to be remanded to judicial or police custody but merely stated that the accused was "being produced before the Hon'ble Court for appropriate orders". In what amounted to be the first instance of its kind in India's legal history, an accused in a criminal case was promptly released by the Magistrate who found nothing in the case "to justify her prosecution" ... I learnt from my sources in the Intelligence Bureau that a message had been conveyed from sources close to the Prime Ministers to the concerned Magistrate ... advising him to take the steps that he took ...⁷¹⁶

But beyond what Singh admits was the 'fiasco' of Indira Gandhi's botched arrest,⁷¹⁷ a further weakness of his political position at this time was that his remit as Home Minister gave him no new powers to help his base among western UP's *kisans*. Consequently, while he beseeched Desai to act on low sugar prices in his home state, Singh found to his dismay that the Prime Minister was not interested. Singh attributed Desai's inaction to him being 'tied in with the business interests' bankrolling the Janata Party.⁷¹⁸ As Singh later recollected, the earliest indication of Desai's ties and loyalty to major industrialists appeared when, shortly after becoming Prime Minister, he chose one of them as his principal private secretary.⁷¹⁹

More fundamentally, Singh cited major differences on core economic policy areas to explain his clashes with Desai, specifically the latter's perceived bias towards big industrial firms like the

⁷¹⁴ Spectacle.

⁷¹⁵ Singh, 'Janata Party', 117-18.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 118; cf. Raghavan, *Indira*, 238.

⁷¹⁷ Singh, 'Janata Party', 111.

⁷¹⁸ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 237.

⁷¹⁹ Singh, 'Janata Party', 125.

Birla corporation, which resulted in failure to provide ‘tube-wells’ for *kisans*. Also, Singh mentioned cases where Desai had decided to fund ‘expansion and renovation’ of two government properties rather than provide clean water and fertilisers to peasants.⁷²⁰

Relations between Singh and Desai broke down further when, in April 1978, Singh felt his Prime Minister had failed to support him amid withering attacks on his reputation by Indian Communists, Dalit groups, and eventually Janata Party MPs in the Lok Sabha, claiming Singh’s appointment as home minister had given the nation’s rich peasants the green light to commit more ‘atrocities’ against Scheduled Caste communities. Singh was particularly upset by this given that he was hospitalised suffering from his first stroke around this time.⁷²¹

But the breaking point came over how to handle Indira Gandhi. On June 28, 1978, Singh publicly criticised the government’s inaction, prompting Desai to demand his resignation. Singh had long favoured a special trial, like the Nuremberg trials, to address what he saw as Indira Gandhi’s severe abuses - undermining the Constitution, curbing freedoms, silencing the press, weakening the judiciary, jailing over 100,000 activists, and damaging the nation’s integrity. Upon resigning on July 1, Singh cited Desai’s refusal to pursue anything beyond a standard trial as his key reason for leaving.⁷²²

Singh, however, quickly regained political momentum, drawing massive support at a *kisan* rally, organised by his supporters, in Delhi on 23 December 1978. Peasants from across India, especially western UP, Haryana, and Punjab, turned out. Singh urged them to pressure their MLAs and MPs for increased rural investment.⁷²³ His hand strengthened, with Naryan writing privately to Desai urging him to reappoint Singh to the cabinet to stop the Janata Party from disintegrating,⁷²⁴ Singh found himself back at the heart of government following his appointment

⁷²⁰ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 252.

⁷²¹ Ibid., 239-40; cf. Singh, ‘Janata Party’, 144-5.

⁷²² Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 240-4.

⁷²³ Marcus F. Franda, ‘An Indian Farm Lobby’, in Howard Handelman (ed.), *The Politics of Agrarian Change in Asia and Latin America* (Bloomington, 1981), 23.

⁷²⁴ Raghavan, *Indira*, 255.

as Finance Minister and as a Deputy Prime Minister on 24 January 1979, two days before which he had called upon ‘farmers to organise themselves ... to ensure their share in the wealth of the nation’ as it was a ‘great injustice’ that the Second Five-Year Plan, discussed in chapter 3, was composed of ‘only 18 per cent allocation for agriculture and 25 per cent for big industries ... [when] 62 per cent of the population of India was ... in agriculture and only 3 per cent in big industries’,⁷²⁵ which allowed him to start preparing a budget to deliver just that.

Thus, as reported on 23 March 1979, Singh announced subsidies to small-scale industries and protections for them through higher excise taxes on goods such as toothpaste, soap, among many other basic products, produced in larger factories.⁷²⁶ He included the recommendations of the Sivaraman Committee in his budget, which shifted the levy on tobacco away from growers to producers, which Singh said in parliament meant that, as recounted by his Finance Secretary, ‘by one stroke of his pen he had relieved millions of farmers from the clutches of tax inspectors’.⁷²⁷ Also, Singh extended ‘food for work’ and rural development programmes for the benefit of poorer farmers and agricultural labourers.⁷²⁸ And he defended his overall budget with razor sharp ‘agrarian populist’ rhetoric, criticising past policies for protecting big industry through import controls, creating a biased, exploitative system favouring a ‘parasitic urban class’. By contrast, Singh promised his budget would correct these distortions and prioritise rural India’s needs.⁷²⁹

Singh’s budget was, however, generally acceptable to those in industry because it only marginally put production and personal taxes up.⁷³⁰ Ergo, it was considerably less radical in practice than implied by his ‘agrarian populist’ rhetoric. Despite this, as reported in the *Times of India*, Singh told a conference of the Kisan Sammelan on 8 April that peasants needed to organise collectively, like how factory workers form unions, etc, to highlight that the nation’s

⁷²⁵ ‘Charan Asks Farmers to Organise Themselves’, *The Tribune*, 22 January 1979.

⁷²⁶ Ho Kwon Ping, ‘Singh Takes the First Step to Capitalism’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 March 1979, 76.

⁷²⁷ G. Ramachandran, *Walking with Giants* (Chennai, 2013), 192.

⁷²⁸ Ping, ‘Capitalism’, 76.

⁷²⁹ Charan Singh, *Underlying Philosophy of the Budget* (New Delhi, 1979), 2-3.

⁷³⁰ Ping, ‘Capitalism’, 77.

advancement and wealth relied on both agricultural output and the welfare of those who worked the land. Although, he also make clear that the Kisan Sammelan cared about developing cottage industries alongside ‘agricultural production and prices’ and was thus not ‘against industrial growth.’⁷³¹

Furthermore, on 30 April, Singh was also reported to have ‘called for restructuring of the agrarian economy on the basis of peasant proprietorship linked by a chain of service co-operatives’ in a speech to the Agricultural University at Hissar,⁷³² not far from the Rohtak district from which Chhotu Ram had hailed (see chapter 1), which highlights his specifically Indian ‘agrarian populist’ take on the policies of land reform and the principle of cooperation (see chapters 1-3).

But unfortunately, time was not to be on Singh’s side, as he would only serve as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister for a few months thereafter as bitter factional infighting continued between Desai and Singh and their respective followings within the party, which profoundly de-stabilised the Janata government and led to its ultimate fall. Indeed, Singh had become increasingly exasperated by what he perceived to be Desai’s continued attempts to undermine him and displace his allies from power, especially Devi Lal (1914-2001), of landed Jat background like Singh and the erstwhile Ram (see chapter 1), and the chief Minister of Haryana (1977-9).⁷³³

Devi Lal, compelled to resign his leadership of the Haryana Janata legislative party in late June 1979 after months of machinations against him on the basis that he was planning to allow the city of Chandigarh to become the capital of Punjab, a question left unresolved by the 1966 re-organisation of the state, asserted at the time of his resignation, according to a write-up in the *Indian Express*, that ‘the administration of Haryana has now become the signal for a move in the BLD constituent to break away from the Janata Party’ which it interpreted as a ‘clear indication

⁷³¹ ‘Charan Asks Kisans to Unite’, *TI*, 8 April 1979.

⁷³² ‘Charan Lays Stress on Peasant Proprietorship’, *The Hindustan Times*, 30 April 1979.

⁷³³ K. C. Yadav, *Chaudhary Devi Lal* (Gurgaon [sic], 2002), ch. 2.

of a concerted plan to force Mr Charan Singh to recognise that the BLD cannot with self-respect continue its association with the Janata party'.⁷³⁴ Simultaneously, reports were appearing claiming that at a recent convention of the Gujarat Kisan Sammelan, 'all district leaders ... pleaded ... to break this anti-farmer Janata Party so as to fight general election in February under the banner of Kisan Sammelan or a new party formed by Mr. Charan Singh.'⁷³⁵

Meanwhile, Singh's personal relations with Desai were also at rock bottom as the latter was infuriated after the former had publicly called for an 'inquiry' to investigate corruption allegations against his son Kanti Desai (d. 2014). Singh claims to have first become aware of these aspects of Desai's past via a 1977 article by diplomat and robust 'Emergency' opponent A.D. Gowala (1900-1989), which alleged that Desai's son had, in Singh's words, 'received large sums of money every month from a business house' while working as Private Secretary during his father's tenure as Finance Minister - although it is unclear which stint Singh was referring, which matters as Desai served as Union Finance Minister several times over his career, first from 1958-63 - and that Desai had seen 'nothing wrong in it'. Gowala's article had also stressed Desai's personally close ties to the state's 'speculating and industrialist class' ever since the early days of his career as a minister in the old Bombay State government during the 1930s. There was also more recent disquiet within Janata ranks about his son's fund-raising activities during the 1977 assembly elections, called by the Janata party to increase its strength in the state legislatures following their victory in the national election of 1977 which were, at that time, still dominated by Indira Gandhi's Congress (R) and the state Chief Ministers she had appointed. Thus, Singh submitted his resignation from the cabinet on 16 July 1979.⁷³⁶

The upshot of the collapse of the Janata government for Singh was that the path was now clear for him to realise his ultimate ambition of becoming Prime Minister of India. Within a few days of his resignation, Singh and his followers, now known as Janata (S), received support from

⁷³⁴ 'Janata in Crisis', *The Indian Express*, 25 June 1979.

⁷³⁵ 'Gujarat Kisan Leaders May Quit Janata', *The Hindustan Times*, 25 June 1979.

⁷³⁶ Singh, 'Janata Party', 125-6; Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 210-16, 247-8, 250, 254.

the ex-Congressman Y. B. Chavan and his group, known as Congress (U), and Congress (I), led by Indira Gandhi after another Congress split in late 1977,⁷³⁷ to form a government on 28 July 1979.⁷³⁸

In his first broadcast to the nation, Singh declared that India's poverty 'must end and basic necessities must be made accessible to every citizen' with the focus of his administration the abolition of unemployment by 'the establishment of small economic units in both industry and agriculture'. He also promised that his government would 'provide full opportunities to all backward castes, weaker sections, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward communities to preserve their identity and ensure their development.'⁷³⁹

Getting to work straight away, Singh gave the Department of Rural Development a higher status within government by naming it the Ministry for Rural Reconstruction in August 1979. He then established a 'National Programme of Training for Rural Youth for Self-Employment in a broad range of agricultural sectors and agro-industries.'⁷⁴⁰ In a speech of 15 August inaugurating the scheme, Singh re-asserted his long held beliefs that the solution to reducing unemployment in the country, and make Indian society more equal, was that 'small units' should be utilised in industry and agriculture, especially activities which could be done by hand, without the use of machines or at the least intermediate level technology, and that the agrarian economy should be comprised primarily of 'small plots of land' worked by peasant proprietors with not a 'big farm', and certainly not 'big mechanised farms ... with big machines running, tractors running' which

⁷³⁷ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 228-9.

⁷³⁸ 'Shapath Graban Samaaroh mein Shri Charan Singh dvaara Pradhaanamantree Pad kee Shapath Graban' ['Shri Charan Singh Taking Oath of Office as Prime Minister at the Swearing-in Ceremony'], (1979), *Charan Singh Archives*, https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/1979-07-28%20Oath%20as%20Prime%20Minister%20of%20India%20by%20Ch.%20Charan%20Singh%20%28Hindi%29_1.pdf, (Accessed 24/09/25).

⁷³⁹ 'Pradhanmantri Shri Charan Singh ka Rashtr ke Naam Sandesh' ['Prime Minister Charan Singh's Address to the Nation'], (1979), *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/1979-07-28%20Address%20to%20the%20Nation%20by%20Prime%20Minister%20Ch.%20Charan%20Singh%20%28Hindi%29.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁷⁴⁰ Lohit, *Charan Singh*, 43-4.

did not 'exist in the British era', in sight.⁷⁴¹ In the pursuit of his promise to serve the interests of the 'backward castes', as noted above, moreover, Singh also considered introducing a 25% reservation for OBCs⁷⁴² in central government employment, although he acknowledged that he did not have the mandate to implement it.⁷⁴³

Despite these achievements, Singh's government collapsed within weeks following Congress (I)'s withdrawal of support from the Lok Sabha, allegedly due to his refusal to drop cases regarding Emergency-era abuses by Indira's son Sanjay Gandhi (1946-1980), including his involvement in forced sterilisation campaigns against poor young men enabled by suspended civil liberties. However, the move may have also been revenge for Singh's role in defeating Indira Gandhi's 1970 proposal to abolish the princes' privy purses, although her measure ultimately passed the following year. Regardless, by lending and then withdrawing her support, Indira Gandhi had not only collapsed the Janata Party but left Singh with little option other than advising the president to dissolve the Lok Sabha and hold new elections, hoping to secure an electoral mandate. But, at the 1980 elections, Singh was removed from power following another huge victory for Indira Gandhi and Congress (I), who had skilfully rebuilt her popularity through a wave of sympathy during her arrest and by rushing to remote Bihar (Belchi) following reports of serious 'atrocities' against Dalits in late May 1977. Her party secured 351 Lok Sabha seats and Singh returned to the backbenches.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴¹ 'Graameen Naryuvakon ko Sva-Rojagaar ke Prashikshan ki Rashtriya Yojana ka Pradhanmantri Shri Charan Singh द्वारा उद्घाटन' ['Prime Minister Shri Charan Singh Inaugurated the National Scheme for Training Rural Youth for Self-Employment'], (1979), *Charan Singh Archives*, <https://charansingh.org/sites/default/files/1979-08-15%20Inauguration%20of%20National%20Training%20scheme%20for%20Rural%20Youth%20by%20Prime%20Minister%20Ch.%20Charan%20Singh%20%28Hindi%29.pdf>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁷⁴² Other Backward Castes i.e. communities seen as socially and economically deprived and not within the Constitutionally defined categories of Scheduled Tribe (Adivasis) or Scheduled Caste (Dalits).

⁷⁴³ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 11; Lohit, *Charan Singh*, 44.

⁷⁴⁴ Myron Weiner, 'Congress Restored', *AS*, 22, 4 (1982), 339-355; Emma Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories* (London, 2003), 28-37; Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 3, 64-5n20, 216ff, 256, 258, 272-6; Clibbens, 'Emergency', 123-92; Lohit, *Charan Singh*, 43; Raghavan, *Indira*, 260ff.

IV: Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Charan Singh was an ‘agrarian populist’ who mobilised peasants against the developmentalist state and expressed himself through Hindu jurisprudential and Gandhian idioms to take precise positions on land reform, cooperatives, and democratic procedures, broadly in line with other ‘agrarian populists’ in India before him. His key intellectual contribution was the ideal of peasant proprietorship, which he championed more explicitly than his predecessors.

Singh’s ‘agrarian populism’, therefore, was distinguished by its emphasis on the peasant proprietor, which resulted in his ‘agrarian populism’ being less marked by the ‘zamindars’ championed by Ram and by the *kisans* and *mazdoors* to whom Ranga and Sahajanand had appealed. By the 1960s, following the abolition of the *zamindari* system, in which Singh had played a significant role, the political context made Singh’s appeals to the peasant proprietor more politically amenable. By this time, the discourse of Nehruvian ‘socialism’, which had dominated the language of politics in Nehru’s India, had receded, allowing Singh’s political register to at least partially fill the gap and resulting in a less socialist form of populist rhetoric. Thus, if Singh’s ‘agrarian populism’, which might be characterised as ‘the populism of peasant proprietors and their advocates’, were included within a preliminary typology of Indian ‘agrarian populism’, Singh’s position would lie between those of Ranga and Ram.

Conclusion

This thesis has traced the usages of 'agrarian populist' ideas in Indian politics, c.1920-80. In a Freeddenite sense of ideological 'morphology',⁷⁴⁵ Indian 'agrarian populism' centred on the two core ideas of the 'people' and the 'elite', with Ram, Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh defining the former as the peasantry and the latter variously as moneylenders, landlords, capitalists and bureaucratic planners. Adjacent concepts included 'imperial populism', Gandhian rural industrialism, and Hindu jurisprudential ideas such as *dharma*. Its peripheral concepts included land reform to expand peasant proprietorship, cooperatives for services such as credit and marketing, and democracy oriented towards rural interests through peasant-based parties.

Regarding the political and intellectual history of Indian 'agrarian populism', moreover, this ideology was first used in 1920s-30s Punjab by Ram, whose ideas, which pitched the 'zamindar' (peasant proprietor/tenant) against the urban money lender and included the championing of service based cooperatives, land reforms designed to work through the existing revenue system to provide relief to indebted peasants and an early parliamentary democratic framework designed to extend democratic consciousness deep into rural India, gained traction during the Great Depression under the British Raj's 'imperial populism' which sought to buttress British rule in the province by maintaining stability in the countryside.

In 1930-40s Bihar, Sahajanand applied, albeit inconsistently, Gandhian and more radical Marxist-Leninist ideas to the 'agrarian populist' tendency to pitch the 'peasant' against money lenders plus the landed aristocracy of Bihar, on account of the harsher political-economic context and more 'socialistic' political climate of Bihar when compared to Punjab, which represented an expression by 'agrarian populists', as Sahajanand ultimately championed cottage industries like Ram and the interests of all peasant classes, to extend cooperation to farming itself

⁷⁴⁵ Cf. Freedden, *Ideologies*, 75-91.

by re-distributing land held by landlords with more than 50 acres in their possession as well as to small farms worked by peasant proprietors and their families.

In the 1950s and 1960s, moreover, the focus shifted to land reform and collectivisation, largely on account of the consequences of *zamindari* abolition successfully agitated for by Sahajanand and others, as opposed by Ranga, who continued to support service cooperatives like Ram and Sahajanand, but did not support general usage of cooperative farms over small, family farms and restricted the former to a more limited usage. Ranga also sought to protect an undifferentiated peasantry from the degradations of money lenders and *zamindars* in addition to a new 'elite' of bureaucrats and economic planning officials which neither Ram nor Sahajanand lived to see. The result was a relatively more 'conservative' rendering of this ideology in some respects, although very similar Hindu jurisprudential ideas drawn on by Ranga to do this were also used by Ram and Sahajanand before him, so they were as much a part of 'agrarian populist' thinking by then.

Lastly, in the 1960s and 1970s, Singh built on Ranga's attempts to forge an 'agrarian populist' alternative to Nehruvian industrialisation through independent political parties by appropriating Gandhian thought, which also inspired Sahajanand and Ranga but not Ram, a time, especially the 1970s, when the meanings of 'Gandhism' were fundamentally different to those in Ram's day. After all, the latter had judged them to pose a profound threat to the stability of the countryside on account of Gandhi's commitment to *satyagraha* which allowed Ram to make significant progress in agrarian reforms which Sahajanand, Ranga and Singh would all come to admire when compared to the limitations placed on pursuing similar policies through the 'big tent', faction-ridden Congress party which later went, albeit partially, for an 'urban biased', heavy industrial focused developmental regime after Indian independence.

Overall, therefore, 'agrarian populist' ideology has a much longer historical gestation and a more complex and dynamic ideological 'morphology' than has hitherto been acknowledged in the Indian historiography. What is more, it is now possible to sketch a preliminary typology of

‘Indian agrarian populism’, all of whose variants fall on the left of the political spectrum, which might be represented as follows. On the right lies ‘the populism of imperialists and their allies’ (Chhotu Ram). To its left lies ‘the populism of peasant proprietors and their advocates’ (Charan Singh), followed by ‘the populism of peasantist social democrats’ (N. G. Ranga), and, finally, at the far left, ‘the populism of radical Marxists’ (Swami Sahajanand Saraswati).

In terms of the broader historiography of ‘populism’ in India, moreover, by uncovering this ‘deep history’ of ‘agrarian populism’, there are also some grounds for contextualising the rise of other types of ‘populism’ in India. These include, firstly, Indira Gandhi’s socialist, anti-poverty ‘populism’ during the 1970s, (see chapter 4), which sought to represent the ‘people’, especially poor landless agricultural labourers and the industrial working class against the ‘vested interests’ of India’s princely families, capitalists and high-ranking bureaucrats.⁷⁴⁶ Secondly, in the 1980s, a regional, cultural-linguistic ‘populism’ was deployed by N. T. Rama Rao (NTR) (1923-1996), a former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, who claimed the ‘people’ were the Telugu masses, including rural dwellers, in opposition to various North Indian, and especially Hindi speaking, ‘elites’.⁷⁴⁷ Finally, Hindu nationalist ‘populism’ has emerged more powerfully than ever under India’s current Prime Minister Narendra Modi (1950-) to champion the Hindu ‘people’ against westernised, English-speaking ‘elites’ (the ‘Khan Market gang’,⁷⁴⁸ etc). It also excludes India’s Muslim minority with a particular vengeance.⁷⁴⁹ After all, Indira Gandhi’s ‘populism’ was, in part, a response to, and then a means of defeating, Singh’s own ‘agrarian populism’. However, recent

⁷⁴⁶ Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1995), 70-77; Corbridge and Harriss, *India*, ch. 4; Guha, *India*, 389-465; Paul D. Kenny, *Populism and Patronage* (Oxford, 2017), 100-122; Partha Chatterjee, *I Am the People* (New York, 2020), 89-94; Rahul De, *A History of Economic Policy in India* (Cambridge, 2024), 69-95; Raghavan, *Indira*, 97-120.

⁷⁴⁷ Atul Kohli, ‘The NTR Phenomenon in Andhra Pradesh’, *AS*, 28, 10 (1988), 991-1017; Kandula Ramesh, *Maverick Messiah* (Gurgaon, 2021).

⁷⁴⁸ Mayank Bhardwaj, ‘Khan Market Gang’, (2019), *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/india/khan-market-gang-modi-mocks-his-elite-adversaries-idUSKCN1T10KL/>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁷⁴⁹ Arvind Rajagopal, ‘The Rise of Hindu Populism in India’s Public Sphere’, *Current History*, 115, 780 (2016), 123-129; Chatterjee, *People*, 105-11; Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India* (Princeton, 2021), 31-3; idem, ‘Populist Welfarism in India’, in Alain Dieckhoff et al. (eds.), *Contemporary Populists in Power* (Cham, 2022), 211-34; Ashutosh Varshney et al., ‘Populism and Hindu Nationalism in India’, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 56, (2021), 204-7; Adnan Naseemullah and Pradeep Chhibber, *Righteous Demagogues* (New York, 2024); Srirupa Roy, *The Political Outsider* (Stanford, 2024).

research suggests her ‘populist’ style was significantly toned down after her return to power in 1980.⁷⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Ranga, who rejoined Congress under Indira in 1972 after leaving Swatantra, later supported a young N. Chandrababu Naidu (1950-), currently Andhra Pradesh’s Chief Minister and a Modi coalition partner since 2024,⁷⁵¹ who, born into a rural, Telugu family, started, but did not complete, a PhD on Ranga’s own ‘economic ideas’,⁷⁵² to become a Congress candidate for the 1978 Andhra Pradesh legislative assembly elections,⁷⁵³ after which he became a state minister with his tenure in the cinematography department bringing him into contact with NTR, whom he ultimately followed into the former’s Telugu Desam Party⁷⁵⁴ (TDP) after it won the 1983 Andhra state elections.⁷⁵⁵

After the collapse of the Janata Party in 1979, moreover, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which participated in it, rechristened itself as the Bharatiya Janata Party⁷⁵⁶ (BJP) in 1980, initially presenting itself as the ‘heir’ to Charan Singh’s party.⁷⁵⁷ In the 1980s, Mahendra Singh Tikait (1935-2011), one of Singh’s political successors in rural UP during the 1980s as head of the Bharatiya Kisan⁷⁵⁸ Union (BKU), an extra-parliamentary farmers’ group whose 1988 protests for higher sugar cane prices helped express widespread discontent with Rajiv Gandhi (1944-1991)’s government, who became Prime Minister after his mother’s 1984 assassination,⁷⁵⁹ which was duly defeated at the 1989 Indian elections, worked with the BJP in the run-up to the 1991 UP parliament and state elections.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁰ Smriti Sawkar, ‘The Resurrection of Durga’, (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2018), 49-316, 323-4.

⁷⁵¹ ‘Narendra Modi Faces First Coalition Test’, *The Guardian*, 6 June 2024.

⁷⁵² Tejaswini Pagadala, *India’s Glocal Leader* (New Delhi, 2018), ch. 1.

⁷⁵³ ‘Chandrababu Naidu’s Journey’, *The Hindu*, 12 June 2024.

⁷⁵⁴ Party of the Telugu Land.

⁷⁵⁵ ‘From ‘CEO CM’ to Kingmaker’, *The Economic Times*, 6 June 2024; Pagadala, *Naidu*, ch. 1.

⁷⁵⁶ Indian People’s Party.

⁷⁵⁷ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York, 1996), 315-19.

⁷⁵⁸ Indian Farmers’

⁷⁵⁹ Frank, *Indira*, ch. 21; Corbridge and Harriss, *India*, ch. 5.

⁷⁶⁰ Zoya Hasan, ‘Shifting Ground’, *JPS*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 165-88.

Therefore, these examples suggest that the ‘agrarian populist’ tradition of Ram and others was eventually overtaken and/or absorbed within more flexible forms of ‘populism’, as variants based on language and religion can, theoretically and practically, attract supporters both in rural and urban areas plus a broader range of social groups. Thus, their specifically ‘agrarian populist’ policy proposals got lost. However, this argument sheds little light on the broader decline of agrarian politics in India from the 1980s onward, as caste, religion, and economic liberalisation began to eclipse land-related concerns.

In 1979, the Janata Party appointed the Mandal Commission, led by B.P. Mandal (1918-1982), a Yadav from Bihar. Its 1980 report proposed extending caste-based reservations - previously limited to Dalits and Adivasis - to include ‘Other Backward Castes’ (OBCs), recommending 27% of government jobs be reserved for them. OBCs made up about 54.4% of India’s population then.⁷⁶¹ Shelved for a decade after the Janata implosion, the Mandal Report was implemented in 1990 under Prime Minister V. P. Singh (1931-2008),⁷⁶² of the Janata Dal⁷⁶³ (1988-2003), formed in 1988 out of a merger of several parties including the remnants of Charan Singh’s BLD,⁷⁶⁴ after it defeated Rajiv Gandhi’s Congress in the 1989 elections.⁷⁶⁵

This development had profound consequences for peasant based ‘agrarian populist’ politics. According to an interviewee of Brass in 1991, who worked with both Charan Singh and V. P. Singh, the latter’s move ‘divided peasants into ... Mandal peasants and non-Mandal peasants’. By contrast, Singh ‘never talked of Mandal ... [but] of ... exploitation of rural people and [the] village’. Consequently, ‘not only Jats but even Brahman[s] were also voting for him’. Thus, Charan Singh’s ‘peasant base’ was ‘destroyed’ by V. P. Singh.⁷⁶⁶ Indeed, V. P. Singh’s government

⁷⁶¹ Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India* (Cambridge, 1999), 266ff, 295.

⁷⁶² Seema Mustafa, *The Lonely Prophet* (New Delhi, 1995).

⁷⁶³ People’s Party.

⁷⁶⁴ Lewis P. Fickett, Jr., ‘The Rise and Fall of the Janata Dal’, *AS*, 33, 12 (1993), 1151.

⁷⁶⁵ Jaffrelot, *Silent Revolution*, 335-386.

⁷⁶⁶ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 13n13.

did not include Jats in its reservations programme, a factor that led Tikait/the BKU to work with the BJP as noted above.⁷⁶⁷

Calling the decision to implement the Mandal Report politically controversial would therefore be a major understatement. The BJP, which had won just two seats in the 1984 elections, gained unprecedented support, especially among urban upper-caste groups, by sharply criticising Mandal. Although initially opposed to reservations, the party later embraced them as part of a strategy to court lower-caste voters, a demographic it had historically struggled to reach due to its upper caste, 'high Hindu' image.⁷⁶⁸

Furthermore, the BJP's Ram Rath Yatra,⁷⁶⁹ led by L. K. Advani (1927-), designed to whip up support for the BJP's allies in the Sangh Parivar⁷⁷⁰ (Family of the Sangh i.e. the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS),⁷⁷¹ or National Volunteers Organisation, and its affiliates) by agitating for the construction of a Hindu temple in Ayodhya⁷⁷² on the Babri Masjid⁷⁷³ site - alleged birthplace of Lord Rama - which was destroyed in 1992 mob violence, which sparked nationwide riots,⁷⁷⁴ also started to attract many rural supporters of the BKU, plus others, towards the party.⁷⁷⁵ Taking power at the national level for the first time in 1996,⁷⁷⁶ the party has, despite several setbacks including electoral losses to Congress and its allies in 2004 and 2009,⁷⁷⁷ been

⁷⁶⁷ Hasan, 'Shifting Ground', 187-8; cf. Prem Chowdhry, 'First Our Jobs Then Our Girls', *MAS*, 43, 2 (2009), 448-49, 449n32.

⁷⁶⁸ Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 43-53; K. Balagopal, 'This Anti-Mandal Mania', *EPW*, 25, 40 (1990), 2231-2234; Gerard Heuze, 'Troubled Anthropologists', *Anthropology Today*, 7, 6 (1991), 5-7; Jangam Chinniah, 'BJP and Reservations', *EPW*, 38, 30 (2003), 3143-3145; Jaffrelot, 'Populist Welfarism.'

⁷⁶⁹ Ram Chariot Procession.

⁷⁷⁰ Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *The Sangh Parivar* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2005).

⁷⁷¹ Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron* (Boulder, CO, 1987); Tapan Basu, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* (London, 1993).

⁷⁷² In Uttar Pradesh.

⁷⁷³ Mosque of Babur - Babur (1483-1530) founded the Mughal Empire in 1526.

⁷⁷⁴ Bayly, *Caste*, 297; cf. Peter Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism* (Berkeley and London, 1994), 3, 7-8, 10-11, 152-62; Jaffrelot, *Movement*, 363ff; Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television* (Cambridge, 2001), 1-29ff; Ornit Shani, 'The Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India', *MAS*, 39, 4 (2005), 895ff.

⁷⁷⁵ Hasan, 'Shifting Ground', 187.

⁷⁷⁶ John McGuire and Ian Copland (eds.), *Hindu Nationalism and Governance* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2007); Angana P. Chatterji et al. (eds.), *Majoritarian State* (London, 2019).

⁷⁷⁷ Yogendra Yadav, 'Radical Shift in the Social Basis of Political Power', *The Hindu*, 20 May 2004; K. K. Kailash, 'Alliances and Lessons of Election 2009', *EPW*, 44, 39 (2009), 52-7.

growing rapidly ever since, skilfully attracting support in rural areas by delivering various kinds of welfare programmes.⁷⁷⁸

The Mandal report, which helped fuel Hindu nationalism, also gave political cover to P. V. Narasimha Rao (1921-2004)'s Congress government, whose party returned to power in 1991 after defeating the Janata Dal,⁷⁷⁹ to introduce major reforms, years in the making, to liberalise the Indian economy.⁷⁸⁰ These reforms overhauled the bureaucratic 'permit-and-license raj' planned economy introduced by Nehru in the early years of Indian independence,⁷⁸¹ making the Indian economy more open to foreign direct investment and private-sector led development, and also facilitated the growth of a large middle class in India.⁷⁸² It also, ultimately, reinforced the growing profile of the BJP at the national level,⁷⁸³ and caused a huge spike in inequality which has meant that India, by 2015 at least, appeared to resemble more of a 'billionaire raj' than a '*kisan raj*' of any kind.⁷⁸⁴

Moreover, India's economic liberalisation, a fundamental policy shift which was not accompanied by a new equivalent agricultural development strategy, which also involved the cutting of farm subsidies causing great hardship among many rural Indians,⁷⁸⁵ symbolised by growing suicide rates among farmers in many localities,⁷⁸⁶ with widespread poverty leading the Congress-led government under Manmohan Singh (1932-2024) in 2004 to launch

⁷⁷⁸ Tariq Thachil, *Elite Parties, Poor Voters* (Cambridge, 2014), 1-35; Shashank Chaturvedi et al., 'The New Modi Wave', *India Forum*, 09 July 2019.

⁷⁷⁹ Walter K. Andersen, 'India's 1991 Elections', *AS*, 31, 10 (1991), 976-989.

⁷⁸⁰ Ashutosh Varshney, 'Mass Politics or Elite Politics?', *The Journal of Policy Reform*, 2, 4 (1988), 301-355.

⁷⁸¹ Aditya Balasubramanian, 'Contesting "Permit and Licence Raj"', *Past & Present*, 251, 1 (2021), 189-227.

⁷⁸² Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent* (Cambridge, 1990), ch. 11; idem, 'Politics of Economic Growth in India, 1980-2005, Part I', *EPW*, Vol. XLI, No. 13 (2006), 1255-7; cf. Corbridge and Harriss, *India*, ch. 7.

⁷⁸³ Jaffrelot, *Movement*, Part V; cf. Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave* (Princeton, 1999), ch. 4, 6; Leela Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class* (Minneapolis and London, 2006), 26-7.

⁷⁸⁴ Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty, 'Indian Income Inequality', *The Review of Income and Wealth*, 65, S1 (2019), S48.

⁷⁸⁵ Abhijit Sen, 'Economic Liberalisation and Agriculture in India', *JSS*, 20, 1 (1992), 4-19; D. Narasimha Reddy and Srijit Mishra (eds.), *Agrarian Crisis in India* (New Delhi, 2009), 3-43; R. Ramakumar (ed.), *Distress in the Fields* (New Delhi, 2022).

⁷⁸⁶ R.S. Deshpande and Saroj Arora, *Agrarian Crisis and Farmers' Suicide* (New Delhi, 2010).

MGNREGA⁷⁸⁷ (2005), guaranteeing at least 100 days of paid work annually to one member of every rural household,⁷⁸⁸ divided India's New Farmers Movements (NFM)s).

A collection of extra-parliamentary, regional organisations, including the BKU, the NFM)s can be generally distinguished from the older movements of Ram and others by their relatively greater interest in agricultural prices and markets, as opposed to issues of land reform and cooperatives, and their deployment of assertive methods of 'direct action' in favour of standing for parliamentary election. While the BKU and Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha⁷⁸⁹ generally opposed liberalisation, Maharashtra's Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana⁷⁹⁰ supported it - which reflects differences in crop types (cash crops vs. grains), profitability, reliance on state support, and potential gains from international market access.⁷⁹¹ These organisations are, also, generally believed by scholars to have subscribed to a 'neo-populist' ideology, although a similar categorisation was problematically applied to Ram's and Singh's ideology (see introduction, chapter 4), and mainly consisted of wealthier farmers who benefited from the uneven rural economic changes driven by the Green Revolution, fully realised by the 1980s.⁷⁹²

Additionally, this development also increased demand, buttressed further by the implementation of the Mandal report in 1990 discussed above, for caste-based parties of the rural poor,⁷⁹³ such as the Bahujan Samaj Party⁷⁹⁴ (BSP) in UP whose Dalit leader Mayawati (1956-) served as the Chief Minister of UP several times in the late 1990s to early 2010s,⁷⁹⁵ to challenge

⁷⁸⁷ The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005.

⁷⁸⁸ James Manor, 'The Politics of Social Protection', in Louise Tillin et al. (eds.), *Politics of Welfare* (New Delhi, 2015), 168-99.

⁷⁸⁹ State Farmers Organisation.

⁷⁹⁰ Self-Respecting Farmers' Organisation.

⁷⁹¹ Tom Brass, 'Introduction: The New Farmers' Movements in India', *JPS*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 4; Muzaffar Assadi, 'Khadi Curtain', 'Weak Capitalism' and 'Operation Ryot', *JPS*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 212-227; Staffan Lindberg, 'New Farmers' Movements in India as a Structural Response and Collective Identity Formation', *JPS*, 21, 3 (1994), 95-125.

⁷⁹² Brass, 'Introduction', 9-12; Jarius Banaji, 'The Farmers' Movements', *JPS*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 228-45; Sucha Singh Gill, 'The Farmers' Movement and Agrarian Change in the Green Revolution Belt of North-West India', *JPS*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 195-211; D. N. Dhanagare, 'The Class Character and Politics of the Farmers' Movement in Maharashtra during the 1980s', *JPS*, 21, 3 (1994), 72-94; idem, *Populism*, ch. 3.

⁷⁹³ Lucia Michelutti, *The Vernacularisation of Democracy* (New Delhi, 2008); Jeffrey Witsoe, *Democracy Against Development* (Chicago and London, 2013).

⁷⁹⁴ Party of the Majority Community.

⁷⁹⁵ Sudha Pai, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution* (New Delhi, 2002); Ajoy Bose, *Behenji* (Gurgaon, 2017); Jayabrata Sarkar, *Politics as a Social Text in India* (New Delhi, 2021).

the new-found dominance of this new, commercialised agrarian ‘elite’, now represented in UP politics by the Yadav-Muslim OBC Samajwadi⁷⁹⁶ Party founded by Mulayam Singh Yadav (1939-2022) in 1992, which effectively captured the Yadav supporters of Singh’s BLD,⁷⁹⁷ and which recently won UP in the 2024 Indian election,⁷⁹⁸ just as the latter had challenged the dominance of the old *zamindars* in the countryside in the 1930s and 1940s.⁷⁹⁹

Thus, with Indian politics shifting toward caste, religion, and economic liberalisation, agrarian issues, although still important, declined in prominence as did the ‘agrarian populist’ tradition represented in different forms by Singh and his predecessors during the 1980s and 1990s.

Nevertheless, agrarian politics remains a strong force in twenty-first century India because, despite industrialisation and urbanisation since liberalisation, 63% of the population still lives in rural areas as of 2024,⁸⁰⁰ and as much as a third of India’s new middle-class lives in rural areas according to one recent study,⁸⁰¹ although most Indians no longer work in agriculture and its contribution to Indian GDP has declined considerably since the 1990s.⁸⁰²

In the 2000s, therefore, rural forces railed against the Special Economic Zone Act 2005, a ‘neo-liberal’ economic policy that allows designated parts of India more liberal economic laws.⁸⁰³ In 2017, farmers in Madhya Pradesh protested Modi’s perceived failure - whose support remains more urban than rural - to maintain high agricultural prices, especially for pulses vital to poor farmers.⁸⁰⁴ In the same year, the All India Kisan Sangharsh⁸⁰⁵ Coordination Committee

⁷⁹⁶ Socialist.

⁷⁹⁷ Brass, *An Indian Political Life*, vol. 1, 8, 27, 86, 112, 124, 148, 319-20.

⁷⁹⁸ Ram Singh, *Mulayam Singh* (New Delhi, 1998); A. K. Verma, ‘Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh’, *EPW*, 39, 14/15 (2004), 1509-1514; ‘Election Results 2024’, *The Hindu*, 4 June 2024.

⁷⁹⁹ Das, *Agrarian Unrest*, 16-17; Jaffrelot, *Silent Revolution*, 335-425; Benbabaali, ‘Caste’, 1969ff.

⁸⁰⁰ ‘Rural Population’, *World Bank Group*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=IN>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁸⁰¹ Maryam Aslany, *Contested Capital* (Cambridge, 2020), 203.

⁸⁰² ‘Employment in Agriculture’, *World Bank Group*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=IN>, (Accessed 11/09/25); ‘Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing, Value Added’, *World Bank Group*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS?locations=IN>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁸⁰³ Kenneth Bo Nielsen and Alf Gunvald Nilsen, ‘India’s Evolving Neoliberal Regime of Dispossession’, *JB*, 71, 4 (2022), 582-600.

⁸⁰⁴ Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘The Return of Kisan Politics’, *The Indian Express*, 24 June 2017.

⁸⁰⁵ Peasant Struggle.

(AIKSCC), a national body made up of 250 farmers' organisations formed in response to a police firing at a peasant protest procession in Madhya Pradesh in 2017,⁸⁰⁶ has strived for higher agricultural prices and loan cancellation.⁸⁰⁷

Furthermore, from 2020-1, starting in Punjab, peasant protestors revived the language of *kisan* and *mazdoor* unity (*kisan mazdoor ekta zindabad*)⁸⁰⁸ to successfully oppose Modi's agricultural reforms, which liberalised the law on food stockpiles alongside permitting agricultural produce to be sold outside of government regulated markets and allowing for 'contract farming' between farmers and agricultural corporations,⁸⁰⁹ which were charged with being a plot to hand over land to big agricultural corporations.⁸¹⁰

The 2024 Indian elections highlighted the revival of agrarian issues, as the BJP's loss of its majority in the Lok Sabha was largely due to decreased support in key rural states like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra amid ongoing protest-related discontent.⁸¹¹ However, the BJP won the Haryana state elections later that year.⁸¹²

Therefore, while rural power has never been inevitable in Indian politics, this thesis suggests that 'agrarian populist' ideas have played an important role in Indian politics since the 1920s, which reflects a deeply 'populist' quality to Indian politics - a notion that warrants further research for confirmation.

⁸⁰⁶ '130 Farmer Groups Form Umbrella Body', *The Hindu (Businessline)*, 12 January 2018.

⁸⁰⁷ Sudhir Kumar Suthar and Manish Kumar, 'Contemporary Farmer's Movements in India', *SB*, 71, 4 (2022), 498.

⁸⁰⁸ A key slogan during the protests meaning: 'Long live peasant and worker unity.'

⁸⁰⁹ Siraj Husain, 'What Will the End of the Road for APMCs Look Like?', *The Wire*, 8 June 2020; idem, 'Will India's Contract Farming Ordinance Be a Corporate Lifeline for Agriculture?', *The Wire*, 16 June 2020; idem, 'The Fine Print of the Essential Commodities Act Ordinance Must be Carefully Parsed', *The Wire*, 22 June 2020.

⁸¹⁰ Satendra Kumar (ed.), 'Special Issue', *SB*, 71, 4 (2022), 483-618; Namita Waikar, *Farmers' Protest* (Melbourne, 2025); Sabah Siddiqui and Shamsher Singh (eds.), *A People's History of the Farmers' Movement* (Abingdon, 2025).

⁸¹¹ 'Did India's Farmers Ditch Modi's BJP in the 2024 Election?', *Al Jazeera*, 7 June 2024; cf. 'India's Farmer Protests Are On the Move Again', *DW*, (2024), <https://www.dw.com/en/indias-farmer-protests-are-on-the-move-again/a-71013831>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

⁸¹² 'General Election to Assembly Constituencies', *Election Commission of India*, <https://results.eci.gov.in/AcResultGenOct2024/partywiseresult-S07.htm>, (Accessed 11/09/25); 'Indian Farmer Leader Ends 123-Day Hunger Strike', *BBC*, 6 January 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2nzn0pyxyo>, (Accessed 11/09/25).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Unpublished

NAI, New Delhi, India

N. G. Ranga Papers.

PMML, New Delhi, India

Charan Singh Papers.

Ram Singh Jakhar Papers.

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati Papers.

Published (English or in English Translation)

Articles, Books and Pamphlets

Agarwal, Shriman Narayan, *The Gandhian Plan of Economic Development for India* (Bombay, 1944).

Bose, S. C., *The Indian Struggle, 1920-1942* [1943?] (Oxford, 1997).

Brayne, F. L., *Village Uplift in India* (Allahabad, 1928).

Chand, Lal, *Self-Abnegation in Politics* [1909] (Lahore, 1938).

Cole, G. D. H., *Guild Socialism Re-stated* (London, 1920).

Darling, Sir Malcolm, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* [1925] (London and New York, 1928), 92.

— *Wisdom and Waste in the Punjab Village* (London, New York, etc, 1934).

Desai, Morarji, *The Story of My Life*, 3 Vols. (New Delhi, 1979).

Deva, Narendra, 'The Peasant in [sic] Indian Revolution', [1939] in Narendra Deva, *Socialism and the National Revolution* (Bombay, 1946), 33-61.

Devi, Gayatri, *A Princess Remembers: The Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur* (New Delhi, 1995).

Dijilas, Milovan, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York, 1957).

Gandhi, M. K., *An Autobiography* [1925-9] (New Haven, 2018).

- *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place* (Poona, 1945).
- *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* [1909] (Cambridge, 2009).
- ‘The Zamindars and the Ryots’, in M. K. Gandhi, *Young India 1919-22* [1922] (Madras, 1924), 741-3.
- Goyal, S. K., ‘Review: The Peasant and Co-operative Farming’ by N. G. Ranga and P. R. Paruchuri, *Indian Economic Review*, 4, 2 (1958), 103-4.
- Gramsci, Antonio, ‘Notes on Italian History’, in Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London, 1971), 52-120.
- Gupta, C. B., *Autobiography, My Triumphs & Tragedies* (Lucknow, 2003).
- Haksar, A. N. D. (trans.), *The Hitopadeśa [Beneficial Advice]* [8th to 10th Century CE] (London, 2006).
- Harcourt, Henry, *Sidelights on the Crisis in India* (London, 1924).
- Hauser, Walter (ed.), *Sabajanand on Agricultural Labour and the Rural Poor: An Edited Translation of Khet Mazdoor* [1941] (New Delhi, 2005).
- *Swami Sabajanand and the Peasants of Jharkhand: A View from 1941* (New Delhi, 2005).
- and Jha, K. C., *Culture, Vernacular Politics, and the Peasants: India, 1889-1950: An Edited Translation of Swami Sabajanand Saraswati’s Mera Jivan Sangharsh* (The Struggle of My Life) (New Delhi, 2015).
- Infield, Henrik F., *Cooperative Living in Palestine* (New York, 1948).
- Jha, Sir Ganganatha (trans.), *Shabara-Bhāṣya* [Śābara’s Commentary], 3 Vols. [200 CE] (Baroda, 1933-6).
- Kripalani, Sucheta, *An Unfinished Autobiography* (Ahmedabad, 1978).
- Kumarappa, J. C., *Why the Village Movement? A Plea for a New Economic Order in India* [1936] (Wardha, 1945).
- Leigh, M. S., *Punjab and the War* (Lahore, 1922).
- Lenin, V. I., *The State and Revolution* [1917] (Moscow, 1969).
- Mann, Harold H., *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village*, 2 Vols. (London and Bombay, 1917-21).
- Masani, M. R., *Against the Tide* (New Delhi, 1981).
- *Congress Misrule and the Swatantra Alternative* (Bombay, 1966),
- Nair, Kusum, *Blossoms in the Dust: The Human Element in Indian Development* (London, 1961).
- Nevill, H. R., *Ghazipur: A Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1909).

– *Meerut District: A Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1904).

Namboodiripad, E. M. S., *Agrarian Reforms: A Study of the Congress and Communist Approach* (New Delhi, 1956).

– *How I Became a Communist* (Trivandrum, 1976).

– *The Peasant in National Economic Construction* (New Delhi, 1954).

Narayan, J. P., *Towards Total Revolution* (Bombay, 1978).

Nath, Narendra, *Memorandum on the Rights Claimed by Hindu Minority in North-West India* (Lahore, 1928).

Nehru, Jawaharlal, *An Autobiography* [1936] (New Delhi, 1982).

– *The Discovery of India* [1946] (London, 1989).

O'Dwyer, Michael, *India As I Knew It* (London, 1925).

Olivelle, Patrick (trans.), *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kautilya's Arthashastra* [3rd Century BCE to 3rd Century CE] (Oxford, 2013).

– (trans.) *The Law Code of Manu* [1st to 3rd Century CE] (Oxford, 2004).

Pradhan, Ramchandra (trans.), *The Struggle of My Life: Autobiography of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati* (New Delhi, 2018).

Prasad, Rajendra, *Autobiography* (Bombay, 1957).

Rajagopalachari, C., *Birth of Swatantra Party (Freedom): Protect Farm and Family* (Bangalore, 1959).

Ram, Chhotu, 'A Speech of Sir Chhotu Ram, 1st March 1942', in *The Punjab Past and Present*, Vol. VIII, Part 1 (1974), 219-225.

– 'The Improvement of Indian Village Life', [1907] in K. C. Yadav (ed.), *The Crisis in India: Reflections of Sir Chhotu Ram* (Kurukshetra, 1996), 71-80.

Ramachandran, G., *Walking with Giants: A Memoir* (Chennai, 2013).

Ranadive, B. T., *Nehru Govt Declares War Against Toilers* (Bombay, 1948).

Ranga, N. G., *Agony and Solace* (Nidubrolu, 1974).

– 'Agricultural Industries', *Indian Journal of Economics*, VII (1927), 492-506.

– *Bapu Blesses* (Nidubrolu, 1969).

– *Credo of World Peasantry* (Nidubrolu, 1957).

- _ *Economic Organisation of Indian Villages*, 2 Vols. (Bezwada, 1926-9).
- _ *Fight for Freedom: Autobiography of N. G. Ranga* (New Delhi, 1968).
- _ *Food Controls vs Peasants* [1948] (Nidubrolu, 2001).
- _ *Gandhian Plan* (Bombay, 1945).
- _ 'Hand Spinning', *Indian Journal of Economics*, VII (1927), 137-49.
- _ *Indian Adult Education Movement* (Rajamundry, 1938).
- _ *Kisan Handbook* (Madras, 1938).
- _ *Kisan Speaks* (Madras, 1937).
- _ *Kisans and Communists* (Bombay, 1949).
- _ *Outlines of National Revolutionary Path* (Bombay, 1945).
- _ *Panchayat Landlordism Versus Peasant Economy* (New Delhi, 1958).
- _ *Self-Employed Sector Their Constructive Role in Planned Economy* (Nidubrolu, 1959).
- _ *Storm Bursts on the Peasantry* (Nidubrolu, 1959).
- _ *The Economics of Handloom* (Bombay, 1930).
- _ *Why Ranga Resigns?* (Nidubrolu, 1959).
- _ and Paruchuri, P. R., *The Peasant and Co-operative Farming: A Socio-Economic Study* (Nidubrolu, 1958)
- _ and Paruchuri, P. R., *The Plan and the Peasant: An Appraisal of the Second Five Year Plan* (Nidubrolu, 1956).
- _ and Saraswati, Swami Sahajanand, *History of Kisan Movement* (Madras, 1939).
- _ and Sarma, R. M. and Naidu, N. V. R., *Economic Conditions of the Zamindari Ryots* (Bezwada, 1993).
- Roy, M. N., 'The Peasant Movement in India', *International Press Correspondence*, 2, 51, (1922), 379.
- Sampurnanand, *Memories and Reflections* (Bombay, 1962).
- Saraswati, Swami Dayananad, *Light of Truth* [1875] (Allahabad, 1915).
- Saraswati, Swami Sahajanand, *Abolition of Zamindari: How to Achieve It* (Patna, 1946).
- _ *Presidential Address: Bihar Provincial Kisan Conference (9th Session: Gaya)* (Gaya, 1942).

- Sandal, Mohan Lal (trans.), *The Mīmāṃsā Sūtras of Jaimini* [200 BCE] (Allahabad, 1923).
- Singh, Charan, *Abolition of Zamindari: Two Alternatives* (Allahabad, 1947).
- *Agrarian Revolution in Uttar Pradesh* (Lucknow, 1958).
- *India's Economic Policy: The Gandhian Blueprint* (New Delhi, 1978).
- *India's Poverty and Its Solution* (Bombay, 1964).
- *Joint Farming X-Rayed: The Problem and Its Solution* (Bombay, 1959).
- *Land Reforms in UP and the Kulaks* (New Delhi, 1986).
- *The Story of New Congress-BKD Relations* (Lucknow, 1970),
- *Underlying Philosophy of the Budget* (New Delhi, 1979),
- *Whither Co-operative Farming?* (Allahabad, 1956).
- *Why 60 Per Cent. Services Should Be Reserved for the Sons of Cultivators* (Lucknow, 1947).
- Slater, Gilbert, *Poverty and the State* (London, 1930).
- *Some South Indian Villages* (London and New York, 1918).
- Stalin, J. V., 'The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists', [1924] in J. V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Moscow, 1945), 94-123.
- Subramaniam, C., *The New Strategy in Indian Agriculture: The First Decade and After* (New Delhi, 1979).
- Tanwar, Raghuvendra (ed.), *Sir Chhotu Ram: Writings and Speeches*, Vols. 1-3 (Kurukshetra, 2022).
- Trevaskis, H. K., *The Punjab of Today: An Economic Survey of the Punjab in Recent Years (1890-1925)*, vol. 1 (Lahore, 1931).
- Tripathi, Kamalapati, *Freedom Movement and Afterwards* (Varanasi, 1989).
- Webb, Beatrice, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain* (London, 1891).
- and Webb, Sidney, *The Consumers' Co-operative Movement* (London and New York, 1921).

Collections of Primary Sources

- Ahmad, Waheed (ed.), *Letters of Mian Faẓl-i-Husain* (Lahore, 1976).
- Archives, Charan Singh, *Charan Singh: Selected Works, 1947-1986*, 7 Vols. (Gurgaon, 2020).
- Basu, Jyoti (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement in India*, 26 Vols. (Calcutta, 1997-9).

Datta, V. N., *New Light on the Punjab Disturbances in 1919: Volumes VI and VII of Disorders Inquiry Committee Evidence*, 2 Vols. (Simla, 1975).

Gandhi, M. K., *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 100 Vols. (New Delhi, 1958-).

Gopal, Sarvepalli (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series (New Delhi, 1984-).

Kumar, Vijoy (ed.), *Kisan Movement: In the Records of Bihar State Archives*, 8 Vols. (Patna, 2015-17).

Lenin, V. I., *Collected Works*, 45 Vols. (Moscow, 1960-70).

Pushpa Kumari, K. V., Narasimha Rao, K. L., Rajagopal Naidu, P., and Amarayya, C. (eds.), *Self-Employed Peasants and Tribal People: A Saga of Rangaji's Life-Long Fight for the Protection and Welfare of Agricultural Toilers and Tribal People* (Nidubrolu, 1983).

Ram, Chhotu, 'Bechara Zamindar' [The Helpless Peasant] in Balbir Singh, *Sir Chhotu Ram: A Saga of Inspirational Leadership* (New Delhi, 2009), 130-235.

Sharma, Raghav Sharan (ed.), *India's War of Independence Through Kisan Documents*, 3 Vols. (New Delhi, 2014).

Singh, Ranbir and Pal, Kushal (eds.), *Peasantry in Colonial India: The Context, Perspective and Text of Sir Chhotu Ram's Bechara Zamindar* (Gurgaon, 2013).

Tanwar, Raghuvendra (ed.), *Sir Chhotu Ram: Writings and Speeches*, Vols. 1-3 (Kurukshetra, 2022).

Zedong, Mao, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, 4 Vols. (Peking, 1961-5).

Government of India Publications and Reports (In Chronological Order)

Report on the Census of the Panjáb Taken on the 17th of February 1881, vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1883).

Report Regarding the Possibility of Introducing Land and Agricultural Banks into the Madras Presidency, 2 Vols. (Madras, 1895-7).

Report of the Famine in the Madras Presidency During 1896 and 1897, 2 Vols. (Madras, 1898).

Census of India, 1901, vol. 6, Part I (Calcutta, 1902).

Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1901 (Calcutta, 1908).

Census of India, 1911, vol. 5, Part I (Calcutta, 1913).

Sedition Committee, 1918: Report (Calcutta, 1918).

Census of India, 1921, vol 15, Part 1 (Lahore, 1923).

Royal Commission on Agriculture in India: Report (Bombay, 1928).

Report on the Working of Co-operative Credit Societies in the Punjab (Lahore, 1929).

Report of the Punjab Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, 1929-30, vol. 1 (Lahore, 1930).

Report on the Working of Co-operative Credit Societies in Punjab (Lahore, 1932).

Report on the Land Revenue Administration of the Province of Bihar (Patna 1933).

Final Settlement Report of the Meerut District (Allahabad, 1940).

The Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act, 1934 (Punjab Act No. VII of 1934): As Modified Up to The 5th October 1940 (Lahore, 1941).

Report on the Working of Debt Conciliation Boards in the Punjab: From the Date of Their Inception Up to the 31st December, 1939 (Lahore, 1942).

Report of the Economic Programme Committee (Allahabad, 1948).

Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee, 2 Vols. (Allahabad, 1948).

Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee (New Delhi, 1949).

Agricultural Legislation in India, 9 Vols. (New Delhi, 1951-).

Who's Who, 1952 (New Delhi, 1953).

Census of India, 1951, vol. 1, Part II-C (New Delhi, 1954).

Report of the Textile Enquiry Committee (New Delhi, 1954).

Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agricultural Planning & Techniques (New Delhi, 1956).

Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agrarian Cooperatives (New Delhi, 1957).

Report of the Committees of the Panel on Land Reforms [1956] (New Delhi, 1959).

Agricultural Development: Problems and Perspectives (New Delhi, 1965).

Journals, Online Media and Newspapers

Al Jazeera

BBC

Daily Leader, The

Digest, Economic

DW

Economics, Indian Journal of

Economic Review, Far Eastern

Economic Times, The

First, Freedom

Guardian, The

Harjian

Hindu, The

Hindustan Times, The

Indian Express, The

India Forum, The

Manchester Guardian, The

National Herald, The

Overseas Hindustan Times, The

Reuters

Swarajya

Times of India, The

Tribune, The

Wire, The

Other Online Sources

Archives, Charan Singh

Archives, Prasar Bharati

Group, World Bank

India, Election Commission of

IndiaVotes

Liberals, Indian

Macrotrends

National Biography, Oxford Dictionary of

Ngranga.in

Overseas Development Institute

Uttar Pradesh, Government of

Vyaakhya

Parliamentary Records

Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council Debates.

Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of the United Provinces.

Punjab Legislative Council Debates.

Party (Or Other Organisational) Documents

All India United Kisan Sabha, The, *The Constitution* (Patna, 1948).

— *Programme and Charter of Kisan Demands* (Bihar, 1949).

Congress, Indian National, *What Congress Fights for: Being the Election Manifesto of the Indian National Congress, 1945-6* (Bombay, 1945).

Dal, Bharatiya Lok, *Presidential Address by Mr. Charan Singh on the Inauguration of the Bharatiya Lok Dal on 29th August 1974* (New Delhi, 1974).

Party, Janata, *Statement on Economic Policy* (New Delhi, 1977).

Party, Krishikar Lok, *Krishikar Lok's Aims and Objects: Presidential Address of Prof. N. G. Ranga M. P., National Leader of Bharat Krishikar Lok Party, on 7th and 8th May 1954* (Tenali, 1954).

Party, Swatantra, *17th Amendment vs Farm, Family, Freedom* (Bombay, 1964),

— *Swatantra Alternative to Third Plan* (Bombay, 1964), 23.

— *To Prosperity Through Freedom* (Bombay, 1960).

— *Why Swatantra?* (Bombay, n.d.).

Research Service, Democratic, *Co-operative Farming: The Great Debate* (Bombay, 1959).

Published (Hindi)

Books and Pamphlets

Gupt, Maithili Sharan, *Bharata-Bharati [The Soul of India]* [1912] (Chicago, 1977).

Saraswati, Swami Sahajanand, *Karmakalap [A Compendium of Actions]* [1926] (Patna, 1948).

_ *Kisan Kaise Larate Hain?* [*How Should the Peasant Fight?*] [1941] (New Delhi, 1989).

_ *Kisan Kya Karen?* [*What Should the Peasant Do?*] [1952] (New Delhi, 1989).

_ *Kisan Sabha ke Sansmaran* [*Recollections of the Kisan Sabha*] (Allahabad, 1947).

Singh, Charan, *Shistachar* [*Etiquette*] [1954] (New Delhi, 1984).

Collections of Primary Sources

Sharma, Raghav Sharan (ed.), *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati Rachnawali* [*Selected Works of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati*], 6 Vols. [2003] (New Delhi, 2010).

Tanwar, Raghuvendra (ed.), *Sir Chhotu Ram: Writings and Speeches*, Vols. 4-5 (Kurukshetra, 2022).

Secondary Sources

Articles and Books (English or in English Translation)

Abraham, John, 'In Search of Dharma: Integral Humanism and the Political Economy of Hindu Nationalism', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42, 1 (2019), 16-32.

Aggarwal, Om Prakash, *Agrarian Legislation in the Punjab*, Vol. 1 (Lahore, 1940).

Agnihotri, H. L. and Malik, Shiva N., *A Profile in Courage: A Biography of Ch. Chhotu Ram* (New Delhi, 1978).

Alam, Jawaid, *Government and Politics in Colonial Bihar, 1921-1937* (New Delhi, 2004).

Alavi, Hamza, 'Peasants and Revolution', *Socialist Register*, 2 (1965), 241-277.

Ali, Imran, *Panjab Politics in the Decade Before Partition* (Lahore, 1975).

_ *The Punjab Under Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Princeton, 1988).

Ali, Tariq Omar, *A Local History of Global Capital: Jute and Peasant Life in the Bengal Delta* (Princeton, 2018).

Amin, Shahid, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* (Berkeley, 1995).

_ 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2', in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies III* (New Delhi, 1984), 53-5.

_ 'Unequal Antagonists: Peasants and Capitalists in Eastern UP in 1930s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16, 42/43 (1981), PE19-PE31.

Amrith, Sunil, *Unruly Waters: How Mountain Rivers and Monsoons Have Shaped South Asia's History* (London, 2020).

Andersen, Walter K., 'India's 1991 Elections: The Uncertain Verdict', *Asian Survey*, 31, 10 (1991), 976-989.

_ and Damle, Shridhar D., *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (Boulder, CO, 1987).

Ankit, Rakesh, 'Janata Party (1974-77): Creation of an All-India Opposition', *History and Sociology of South Asia*, 11, 1 (2017), 39-54.

Ansari, Sarah F. D., *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843-1947* (Cambridge, 1992).

Arnold, David, 'Famine in Peasant Consciousness and Peasant Action: Madras, 1876-8', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies III* (New Delhi, 1984), 62-115.

Aslany, Maryam, *Contested Capital: Rural Middle Classes in India* (Cambridge, 2020).

Assadi, Muzaffar, 'Khadi Curtain', 'Weak Capitalism' and 'Operation Ryot': Some Ambiguities in Farmers' Discourse, Karnataka and Maharashtra 1980-93', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 212-227.

Attwood, D. M. and Baviskar, B. S., 'Why Do Some Co-operatives Work but Not Others? A Comparative Analysis of Sugar Co-operatives in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22, 26 (1987), A38-A56.

Atwal, Priya, *Royals and Rebels: The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire* (London, 2020).

Austin, Granville, *Working a Democratic Constitution: The Indian Experience* (New Delhi and New York, 1999).

Bajpai, Rochana, *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India* (New Delhi, 2011).

Baker, Christopher John, 'Frogs and Farmers: The Green Revolution in India, and its Murky Past', in Tim Bayliss-Smith and Sudhir Wanmali (eds.), *Understanding Green Revolutions: Agrarian Change and Development Planning in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1984), 37-52.

_ 'The Congress at the 1937 Elections in Madras', *Modern Asian Studies*, 10, 4 (1976), 557-589.

_ *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937* (Cambridge, 1976).

_ and Washbrook, David (eds.), *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880-1940* (New Delhi, 1975).

Bakshi, S. R., *Swaraj Party and Indian National Congress* (New Delhi, 1985).

Balogopal, K., 'This Anti-Mandal Mania', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25, 40 (1990), 2231-2234.

Balasubramanian, Aditya, 'A More Indian Path to Prosperity? Hindu Nationalism and Development in the Mid-Twentieth Century and Beyond', *Capitalism*, 3, 2 (2022), 333-378.

_ 'Contesting 'Permit and Licence Raj': Economic Conservatism and the Idea of Democracy in 1950s India', *Past & Present*, 251, 1 (2021), 189-227.

_ *Toward a Free Economy: Swatantra and Opposition Politics in Democratic India* (Princeton, 2023).

- Ball, Alan M., *Russia's Last Capitalists: The Nepmen, 1921-1929* (Berkeley, 1987).
- Banaji, Jarius, 'The Farmers' Movements: A Critique of Conservative Rural Coalitions', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 228-45.
- Banerjee, Mukulika, *Why India Votes?* (New Delhi, 2014).
- Bapu, Prabhu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915-1930: Constructing Nation and History* (London, 2013).
- Barrier, N. G., *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* (Durham, 1966).
- Basu, Tapan, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right* (London, 1993).
- Baxter, Craig, 'The People's Party Vs. The Punjab 'Feudalists'', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 8, 3-4 (1973), 6-29.
- Bayly, C. A., 'Rallying Around the Subaltern', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 16, 1 (1988), 110-120.
- 'Rammohan Roy and the Advent of Constitutional Liberalism in India, 1800-1830', in Shruti Kapila (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010), 18-34.
- *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2012).
- 'The Ends of Liberalism and the Political Thought of Nehru's India', *Modern Intellectual History*, 12, 3 (2015), 605-626.
- *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880-1920* (Oxford, 1975).
- Bayly, Susan, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge, 1999).
- Bell, John D., *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union* (Princeton, 1977).
- Belotti, Lorenzo M., 'An Analysis of the Italian Agrarian Reform', *Land Economics*, 36, 2 (1960), 118-128.
- Benbabaali, Dalel, 'Caste, Dominance and Territory in South India: Understanding Kammas' Socio-Spatial Mobility', *Modern Asian Studies*, 52, 6 (2018), 1938-1976.
- Beneš, Jakub S., *The Last Peasant War: Violence and Revolution in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Princeton, 2025).
- Béteille, André, *Six Essays in Comparative Sociology* (New Delhi, 1974).
- Bevir, Mark, 'Narrative as a Form of Explanation', *Disputatio*, 9, 1 (2000), 10-18.
- Bhagat-Ganguly, Varsha, 'Revisiting the Nav Nirman Andolan of Gujarat', *Sociological Bulletin*, 63, 1 (2014), 95-112.

Bhardwaj, M. L., 'Sir Chhotu Ram', in N. B. Sen (ed.), *Punjab's Eminent Hindus* (Lahore, 1943), 13-16.

Bhargav, Vanya Vaidehi, *Being Hindu, Being Indian: Lala Lajpat Rai's Ideas of Nationhood* (Haryana, 2024).

Bhatia, B. M., *Famines in India: A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India, 1860-1945* (London, 1963).

Bhattacharjea, Ajit, *Jayaprakash Narayan: A Political Biography* (New Delhi, 1975).

Bhattacharya, Neeladri, 'Lenders and Debtors: Punjab Countryside, 1880-1940', *Studies in History*, 1, 2 (1985), 305-342.

Bhattacharyya, Swasti, 'Vinoba's Sarvodaya: A Gandhian Example of Radical Inclusion', in Veena R. Howard and Falon Kartch (eds.), *Gandhi's Global Legacy: Moral Methods and Modern Challenges* (Lanham, 2023), 299-316.

Blom Hansen, Thomas, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, 1999).

Booth, William James, 'A Note on the Idea of the Moral Economy', *The American Political Science Review*, 87, 4 (1993), 949-54.

Bose, Ajoy, *Bebenji: Rise and Fall of Mayawati* (Gurgaon, 2017).

Bose, Sugata, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle Against Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2011).

_ 'The Spirit and Form of An Ethical Polity: A Meditation on Aurobindo's Thought', in Shruti Kapila (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010), 117-132.

Brass, Paul R., *An Indian Political Life: Charan Singh and Congress Politics*, 3 Vols. (New Delhi, London and Los Angeles, 2011-14).

_ *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh* (Berkeley, 1965).

_ 'The Political Uses of Crisis: The Bihar Famine of 1966-67', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45, 2 (1986), 245-67.

_ 'The Politicization of the Peasantry in a North Indian State: I', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 7, 4 (1980), 395-426.

_ 'Uttar Pradesh', in Myron Weiner (ed.), *State Politics in India* (Princeton, 1968), 61-124.

Brass, Tom (ed.), *New Farmers' Movements in India* (London, 1995).

_ 'Introduction: The New Farmers' Movements in India', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 3-26.

- *Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth* (London, 2000).
- ‘The Politics of Gender, Nature and Nation in the Discourse of the New Farmers’ Movements’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 27-71.
- Brennan, Lance, ‘From One Raj to Another: Congress Politics in Rohilkhand, 1930-50’, in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-1947* (London, 1977), 473-504.
- Brown, Carolyn Henning, ‘Raja and Rank in North Bihar’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, 4 (1988), 757-782.
- Brown, Judith M., *Gandhi’s Rise to Power: Indian Politics, 1915-1922* (Cambridge, 1972).
- *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics, 1928-34* (Cambridge, 1977).
- *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (New Haven and London, 1989).
- Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen (eds.), *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London, 1999).
- Byres, Terence J., ‘Charan Singh, 1902-87: An Assessment’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 15, 2 (1988), 139-89.
- ‘Of Neo-Populist Pipe Dreams: Daedalus in the Third World and the Myth of Urban Bias’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 6, 2 (1979), 210-244.
- Cannadine, David, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford and New York, 2001).
- Canovan, Margaret, *Populism* (London, 1981).
- Catanach, I. J., ‘Agrarian Disturbances in Nineteenth Century India’, *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 3, 1 (1966), 65-84.
- Cell, John W., *Hailey: A Study in British Imperialism, 1872-1969* (Cambridge, 1992).
- Chakrabarty, Bidyut, *Communism in India: Events, Processes and Ideologies* (New York, 2014).
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000).
- Chakravarty, Sukhamoy, *Development Planning: The Indian Experience* (Oxford, 1987).
- Chancel, Lucas and Piketty, Thomas, ‘Indian Income Inequality, 1922-2015: From British to Raj to Billionaire Raj?’, *The Review of Income and Wealth*, 65, S1 (2019), S33-S62.
- Chandra, Bipan, *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency* (New Delhi, 2003).
- *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905* (New Delhi, 1966).

Charlesworth, Neil, *Peasants and Imperial Rule: Agriculture and Agrarian Society in the Bombay Presidency, 1850-1935* (Cambridge, 1985).

Chatterjee, Partha, *A Possible India: Essays in Political Criticism* (New Delhi, 1998).

— *I Am the People: Reflections on Popular Sovereignty* (New York, 2020).

— *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London, 1986).

Chatterji, Angana P., Blom Hansen, Thomas and Jaffrelot, Christophe (eds.), *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India* (London, 2019).

Chaturvedi, Vinayak, 'C. A. Bayly's Unfinished Business: A History of Ideas in an Old Manuscript', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 45 1 (2022), 85-102.

— *Peasant Pasts: History and Memory in Western India* (Berkeley and London, 2007).

Chaudhuri, Asim Kumar, *Socialist Movement in India: The Congress Socialist Party, 1934-1947* (Calcutta, 1980).

Chibber, Vivek, *Locked in Place: State-Building and Late Industrialization in India* (Princeton, 2003).

Chinnaiah, Jangam, 'BJP and Reservations: Quota Politics or Electoral Convenience?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38, 30 (2003), 3143-3145.

Choudary, K. B., *A Brief History of the Kammas* (Sangam Jagarlamudi, 1955).

Chowdhry, Prem, 'First Our Jobs Then Our Girls': The Dominant Caste Perceptions on the 'Rising' Dalits', *Modern Asian Studies*, 43, 2 (2009), 437-479.

— *Punjab Politics: The Role of Sir Chhotu Ram* (New Delhi, 1984).

Clooney, Francis X., *Thinking Ritually: Rediscovery the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā of Jaimini* (Vienna, 1990).

Condos, Mark, *The Insecurity State: Punjab and the Making of Colonial Power in British India* (Cambridge, 2017).

Crawley, W. F., 'Kisan Sabhas and Agrarian Revolt in the United Provinces 1920 to 1921', *Modern Asian Studies*, 5, 2 (1971), 95-109.

Damodaran, Vinita, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935-1946* (New Delhi and Oxford, 1992).

Das, Arvind N., 'Agrarian Change from Above and Below: Bihar 1947-78', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II* (New Delhi, 1983), 180-227.

— *Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar, 1900-1980* (New Delhi, 1983).

Dasgupta, Ajit Kumar, *Gandhi's Economic Thought* (London, 1996).

Datta, K. K., *History of the Freedom Movement in Bihar*, 3 Vols. (Patna, 1957-8).

- Datta, Nonica, *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats* (New Delhi, 1999).
- Davis Jr. Donald R., *The Spirit of Hindu Law* (Cambridge, 2016).
- Davis, Mike, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London, 2001).
- De, Rahul, *A History of Economic Policy in India: Crisis, Coalitions and Contingency* (Cambridge, 2024).
- De, Rohit, *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton, 2018).
- _ and Shani, Ornit, 'Assembling India's Constitution: Towards a New History', *Past & Present*, 263, 1 (2024), 205-48.
- DeMare, Brian, *Land Wars: The Story of China's Agrarian Revolution* (Stanford, 2020).
- Desai, A. R., *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (London, 1948).
- Deshpande, R.S., and Arora, Saroj, *Agrarian Crisis and Farmers' Suicide* (New Delhi, 2010).
- Devji, Faisal, 'Apologetic Modernity', in Shruti Kapila, (ed.), *An Intellectual for History for India* (New Delhi, 2010), 52-67.
- _ *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (London, 2012).
- _ *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (London, 2013).
- Dewey, Clive, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: The Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (London, 1993).
- Dhanagare, D. N., *Peasant Movements in India, 1920-50* (New Delhi, 1983).
- _ *Populism and Power: Farmers' Movement in Western India, 1980-2014* (London, 2016).
- _ 'The Class Character and Politics of the Farmers' Movement in Maharashtra during the 1980s', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21, 3 (1994), 72-94.
- _ 'The Politics of Survival: Peasant Organizations and the Left-Wing in India, 1925-46', *Sociological Bulletin*, 24, 1 (1975), 29-54.
- Dhanda, Praveen, 'Ideas of Charan Singh: An Alternative Perspective of Development', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 54, 14 (2019), 35-42.
- Dhulipala, Venkat, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India* (Cambridge, 2015).
- Dodson, Michael S., 'Contesting Translations: Orientalism and the Interpretation of the *Vedas*', in Shruti Kapila (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010), 35-51.
- Duncan, Ian, 'Party Politics and the North Indian Peasantry: The Rise of the Bharatiya Kranti Dal in Uttar Pradesh', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 16, 1 (1988), 40-76.

Dutt, Brahm, *Five Headed Monster: A Factual Narrative of the Genesis of the Janata Party* (New Delhi, 1978).

Elliot, Carolyn M., 'Caste and Faction Among the Dominant Caste: The Reddis and Kammas of Andhra', in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (New Delhi, 1970), 129-74.

Erdman, Howard L., *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism* (Cambridge, 1967).

Fairbairn, Brett, 'The Meaning of Rochdale: The Rochdale Pioneers and the Co-operative Principles', (Occasional Paper Series #9 4-02, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, 1994).

Fernandes, Leela, *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform* (Minneapolis and London, 2006).

Fickett, Jr., Lewis P., 'The Major Socialist Parties of India in the 1967 Election', *Asian Survey*, 8, 6 (1968), 489-98.

— 'The Rise and Fall of the Janata Dal', *Asian Survey*, 33, 12 (1993), 1151-1162.

Figes, Orlando, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution* (London, 1997).

Franda, Marcus F., 'An Indian Farm Lobby: The Kisan Sammelan', in Howard Handelman (ed.), *The Politics of Agrarian Change in Asia and Latin America* (Bloomington, 1981), 17-34.

Frank, Katherine, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* (London, 2001).

Frankel, Francine R., *India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs* (Princeton, 1971).

— *India's Political Economy, 1947-1977: The Gradual Revolution* (Princeton, 1978).

Freedden, Michael, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford, 1996).

Frykenberg, Robert Eric, *Guntur District, 1788-1848: A History of Local Influence and Central Authority in South India* (Oxford, 1965).

George, Lucian, 'Interpreting Alexander Chayanov's Peasant Utopia Since 1991', *Historia i polityka*, 45, 38 (2021), 9-34.

Ghosh, Durba, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919-1947* (Cambridge, 2017).

Ghosh, Rajashri, 'Naxalism: The Left-Wing Extremist Movement in India', *Polish Political Science*, 52, 2 (2023), 7-22.

Ghurye, G. S., *Indian Sadhus* (Bombay, 1953).

Gill, Navyug, *Labors of Division: Global Capitalism and the Emergence of the Peasant in Colonial India* (Stanford, CA, 2024).

Gill, Sucha Singh, 'The Farmers' Movement and Agrarian Change in the Green Revolution Belt of North-West India', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 195-211.

Gilmartin, David, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London, 1988).

Gilmour, David, *Curzon* (London, 1995).

Gopal, Madan, *Sir Chhotu Ram: A Political Biography* (New Delhi, 1977).

— *Sir Chhotu Ram: The Man & The Vision* (Ghaziabad, 1997).

Gopal, Sarvepalli, 'Book Reviews: C. J. Baker and D. A. Washbrook', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 14, 3 (1977), 405-11.

— *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, 3 Vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1976-84).

Gordon, Richard, 'The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress', *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, 2 (1975), 145-203.

Gould, Harold A., 'Gandhi, Marx, and Charan Singh: Class and *Gemeinschaft* in Peasant Mobilization' in William Pinch (ed.), *Speaking of Peasants: Essays on Indian History and Politics in Honor of Walter Hauser* (New Delhi, 2008), 71-108.

Gould, William, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge, 2004).

Govindu, Venu Madhav and Malghan, Deepak (eds.), *The Web of Freedom: J. C. Kumarappa and Gandhi's Struggle for Economic Justice* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2016),

Graham, B. D., *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge, 1990).

Greenough, Paul R., *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-1944* (New York and Oxford, 1982).

Grodzins Gold, Ann and Gujar, Bhoju Ram, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan* (Durham, NC, 2002).

Grover, D. R., *Civil Disobedience Movement in the Punjab, 1930-34* (New Delhi, 1987).

Guha, Ramachandra, *Gandhi Before India* (London, 2013).

— *Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World, 1914-1948* (London, 2018).

— *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (New York, 2007).

Guha, Ranajit, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Paris, 1963).

— *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1983).

- ‘Preface’ and ‘On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India’, in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I* (New Delhi, 1982), xii-xiii, 1-8.
- ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’, in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II* (New Delhi, 1983), 1-42.
- Gupta, Akhil, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham, NC, 1998).
- Gupta, Amit Kumar, *The Agrarian Drama: The Leftists and the Rural Poor in India, 1934-1951* (New Delhi, 1996).
- Gupta, Charu, *Hindi Hindu Histories: Caste, Ayurveda, Travel, and Communism in Early-Twentieth Century India* (Albany, 2024).
- Gupta, Rakesh, *Bihar Peasantry and the Kisan Sabha, 1936-947* (New Delhi, 1982).
- Haas, Dominik A., *Gāyatrī: Mantra and Mother of the Vedas* (Vienna, 2023).
- Habib, Irfan, Irfan Habib, ‘Mahatma Gandhi and the National Question’, *Social Scientist*, 47, 1-2 (2019), 3-14.
- *The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707)* (New York, 1963).
- Hanson, A. H., *The Process of Planning: A Study of India’s Five-Year Plans, 1950-1964* (London, 1966).
- Harcourt, Max, ‘Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India: The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces’, in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-1947* (London, 1977), 315-348.
- Hardiman, David, *Feeding the Baniya: Peasants and Usurers in Western India* (New Delhi, 1996).
- *Noncooperation in India: Nonviolent Strategy and Protest, 1920-22* (London, 2021).
- *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District, 1917-1934* (New Delhi, 1981).
- ‘The Bhils and Shahukars of Eastern Gujarat’, in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies V* (New Delhi, 1987), 1-54.
- ‘The Crisis of the Lesser Patidars: Peasant Agitations in Kheda District, Gujarat, 1917-34’, in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-1947* (London, 1977), 47-75.
- ‘The Indian ‘Faction’: A Political Theory Examined’, in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I* (New Delhi, 1982), 198-232.
- *The Nonviolent Struggle for Indian Freedom, 1905-19* (New York, 2019).
- Harding, Neil, *Leninism* (Basingstoke, 1996).
- Harper, Tim, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).

Harrison, Selig S., 'Caste and the Andhra Communists', *The American Political Science Review*, 50, 2 (1956), 378-404.

_ *India: The Most Dangerous Decades* (Princeton, 1960).

Hasan, Nurul, 'Zamindars Under the Mughals', [1969] in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Mughal State, 1526-1750* (New Delhi, 1998), 284-298.

Hasan, Zoya, *Quest for Power: Oppositional Movements and Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh* (New Delhi, 1998).

_ 'Shifting Ground: Hindutva Politics and the Farmers' Movement in Uttar Pradesh', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 165-94.

Hauser, Walter, 'From Peasant Soldiering to Peasant Activism: Reflections on the Transition of a Martial Tradition in the Flaming Fields of Bihar', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 47, 3 (2004), 401-34.

_ 'Peasants, Activists, and Scholars: A Late Twentieth-Century Reflection on Definitions', in Chittabrata Palit, Amit Bhattacharyya and Ranjan Chakrabarti (eds.), *Political Economy and Protest in Colonial India: Professor Sunil Kumar Sen Commemoration Volume* (Calcutta, 1997), 251-65.

_ 'Swami Sahajanand and the Politics of Social Reform', *Indian Historical Review*, 18, 1-2 (1991-2), 59-75.

_ *The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929-1942: A Study of An Indian Peasant Movement* [1961] (Abingdon, 2019).

Hausner, Sondra L., *Wandering with Sadhus: Ascetics in the Hindu Himalayas* (Bloomington, 2007).

Heeger, Gerald A., 'The Growth of the Congress Movement in Punjab, 1920-1940', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 32, 1 (1972), 39-51.

Heidrich, Petra, 'The Indian Village as Perceived by Peasant Leaders in Late Colonial India', in Bernt Glatzer (ed.), *Essays on South Asian Society, Culture and Politics II* [1998] (Berlin, 2021), 71-82.

Henningham, Stephen, *A Great Estate and its Landlords in Colonial India: Darbhanga, 1860-1942* (New Delhi, 1990).

_ *Peasant Movements in Colonial India: North Bihar, 1917-1942* (Canberra, 1982).

_ 'Quit India in Bihar and the Eastern United Provinces: The Dual Revolt', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II* (New Delhi, 1983), 130-79.

Heuze, Gerard, 'Troubled Anthropologists: The Controversy Over Employment Quotas in India', *Anthropology Today*, 7, 6 (1991), 5-7.

Hitchins, Keith, *Rumania, 1866-1947* (Oxford, 1994).

Hooda, R. K., *Man of the Masses, Chaudhry Charan Singh: First Peasant Prime Minister of India* (New Delhi, 1979).

Hough, Eleanor Margaret, *The Co-operative Movement in India* (London, 1932).

Husain, Muhammad Azim, *Fazl-i-Husain: A Political Biography* (Bombay and New York, 1946).

Hutchins, Francis G., *India's Revolution: Gandhi and the Quit India Movement* (Cambridge, MA, 1973).

Islam, M. Mufakharul, 'The Punjab Land Alienation Act and the Professional Moneylenders', *Modern Asian Studies*, 29, 2 (1995), 271-291.

Jackson, Ben, *Equality and the British Left: A Study in Progressive Political Thought, 1900-64* (Manchester and New York, 2007).

Jaffrelot, Christophe, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (New York and London, 2003).

— *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Princeton, 2021).

— 'Populist Welfarism in India: How Modi Relates to the Poor', in Alain Dieckhoff, Christophe Jaffrelot and Elise Massicard (eds.), *Contemporary Populists in Power* (Cham, 2022), 211-234.

— *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York, 1996).

— (ed.), *The Sangh Parivar* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2005).

— and Anil, Pratinav, *India's First Dictatorship: The Emergency, 1975-1977* (London, 2020).

— and Tillin, Louise, 'Populism in India', in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford, 2017), 179-194.

Jalal, Ayesha, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 1995).

— 'Striking a Just Balance: Maluna Azad as a Theorist of Transnational Jihad', in Shruti Kapila (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010), 85-97.

— *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge, 1985).

— and Seal, Anil, 'Alternative to Partition: Muslim Politics Between the Wars', *Modern Asian Studies*, 15, 3 (1981), 415-454.

Jeffrey, C., 'Richer Farmers and Agrarian Change in Meerut District, Uttar Pradesh, India', *Environment and Planning, A*, 29, 12 (1997), 2113-2127.

Jeffrey, Robin, 'Matriliny, Marxism, and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 38, 1 (1978), 77-98.

- Jha, Bhuwan Kumar, 'Militarizing the Community: Hindu Mahasabha's Initiative (1915-1940)', *Studies in History*, 29, 1 (2013), 119-146.
- Jha, Punil Kumar, *Activities of Dr. Sri Krishna Singh in Provincial Politics, 1919-1947* (Patna, 2009).
- Johnson, W. J., *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford 2009).
- Jones, Kenneth W., 'Communalism in the Punjab: The Arya Samaj Contribution', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 28, 1 (1968), 39-54.
- Jordens, J. T. F., *Dayananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas* (New Delhi, 1978).
- Kailash, K. K., 'Alliances and Lessons of Election 2009', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44, 39 (2009), 52-7.
- Kamenov, Nikolay, 'The Place of the 'Cooperative' in the Agrarian History of India, c.1900-1970', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 79, 1 (2020), 103-128.
- Kandaswamy, P., *The Political Career of K. Kamaraj: A Study in the Politics of Tamilnadu, 1920-1975* (New Delhi, 2001).
- Kapila, Shruti (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010).
- 'Self, Spencer and *Swaraj*: Nationalist Thought and Critiques of Liberalism, 1890-1920', in Shruti Kapila (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010), 98-116.
- *Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age* (Princeton, 2021).
- and Devji, Faisal (eds.), *Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern India* (New Delhi, 2013).
- Kashyap, Subhash C., *The Politics of Defection: A Study of State Politics in India* (New Delhi, 1969).
- Kataoka, Tetsuya, *Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front* (Berkeley, 1974).
- Kaviraj, Sudipta, 'Contradictions of Conservatism', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 6, 1 (2018), 1-14.
- *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New York and Chichester, 2010).
- Kazin, Michael, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 2006).
- Keiko, Yamada, 'Politics and Representation of Caste Identity in Regional Historiography: A Case Study of Kammas in Andhra', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 3 (2008), 353-80.
- Kenny, Paul D., *Populism and Patronage: Why Populists Win Elections in India, Asia and Beyond* (Oxford, 2017).
- Kerblay, Basile, 'A. V. Chayanov: Life, Career, Works', in Daniel Thorner, Basile Kerblay and R. E. F. Smith (eds.), *A. V. Chayanov on The Theory of Peasant Economy* (Homewood, IL, 1966), xxv-lxxv.

Khan, Yasmin, *The Raj at War* (London, 2015).

Khare, R. S., 'The Kānya-Kubja Brahmins and Their Caste Organization', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 16, 3 (1960), 348-367.

Khilnani, N. M., *British Power in the Punjab, 1839-1858* (Bombay and London, 1972).

Khilnani, Sunil, *Incarnations: India in 50 Lives* (London, 2016).

— *The Idea of India* (London, 1997).

Khurshid, Muhammad, *Feudal Ascendancy and the Role of Sir Fazl-i-Husain in the Punjab Politics (1901-1936)* (Islamabad, 2014).

Kiran, Naumana, 'Sir Chhotu Ram: A Case Study of His Ideology', *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 47, 1 (2010), 143-171.

Kochanek, Stanley A., *The Congress Party of India: The Dynamics of a One-Party Democracy* (Princeton, 1968).

Kohli, Atul, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge, 1990).

— 'Politics of Economic Growth in India, 1980-2005, Part I: The 1980s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLI, No. 13 (2006), 1251-1259.

— 'The NTR Phenomenon in Andhra Pradesh: Political Change in a South Indian State', *Asian Survey*, 28, 10 (1988), 991-1017.

Kothari, Rajni, *Politics in India* (Boston, 1970).

— 'Political Consensus in India: Decline and Reconstruction', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4, 41 (1969), 1639-1644.

— 'The Political Change of 1967', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6, 3/5 (1971), 231-250.

Kotkin, Stephen, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-41* (London, 2017).

Krishnamurty, J., 'Manohar Lal: Scholar, Economist and Statesman', *Modern Asian Studies*, 44, 3 (2010), 641-662.

Kudaisya, Gyanesh, *A Republic in the Making: India in the 1950s* (New Delhi, 2017).

Kumar, Arun, *Rewriting the Language of Politics: Kisans in Colonial Bihar* (New Delhi, 2001).

Kumar, Dalip, 'Introduction', in Dalip Kumar (ed.), *Rural Development and Social Change: Thoughts of Swami Sahajanand* (New Delhi, 2007), xv-xxx.

Kumar, Prakash, *A History of India's Green Revolution: A Reign of Technocracy* (Cambridge, 2025).

Kumar, Pratyush, 'A *Kisan* at the Crossroads of History, Politics and Law: Political Thought and Action of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati', *Südasien-Chronik - South Asia Chronicle*, 11 (2021), 179-215.

— 'Swami Sahajanand Saraswati: Social Reforms and Democratic Praxis', in Himanshu Roy and Mahendra Prasad Singh (eds.), *Indian Political Thought: Themes and Thinkers* (Uttar Pradesh, India, 2020).

Kumar, Purushottam, 'Bhumihars Struggle for Brahmin Status (1857-1911)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 56 (1995), 739-41.

Kumar, Satendra (ed.), 'Special Issue: New Farm Bills and Farmers' Resistance to Neoliberalism', *Sociological Bulletin*, 71, 4 (2022), 483-618.

Kuracina, William F., *Politics and Left Unity: The United Front in Late Colonial India* (London, 2018).

Kuwajima, Sho, *Peasants and Peasant Leaders in Contemporary History: A Case of Bihar in India* (New Delhi, 2017).

Larkin, Andrew, 'Denmark's Agricultural Institutions: An Instrumental Evaluation', *Journal of Economic Issues*, 22, 4 (1988), 1123-1141.

Limaye Madhu, *Janata Party Experiment*, 2 Vols. (New Delhi, 1994).

Lindberg, Staffan, 'New Farmers' Movements in India as a Structural Response and Collective Identity Formation: The Cases of the Shetkari Sanghatana and the BKU', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21, 3 (1994), 95-125.

Lindley, Mark, J. C. *Kumarappa: Mahatma Gandhi's Economist* (Mumbai, 2007).

Lipton, Michael, *Why Poor People Stay Poor: A Study of Urban Bias in World Development* (London, 1977).

Lloyd, Nick, 'Sir Michael O'Dwyer and 'Imperial Terrorism' in the Punjab, 1919', *South Asia*, 33, 3 (2010), 363-380.

Lohit, Harsh Singh, *Charan Singh, 1902-1987* (Gurugram, 2018).

Low, D. A., 'Introduction', in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-1947* (London, 1977), 1-46.

Lyman, S. P. and Mokkapati, Shriram, 'Bharatiya Jana Sangh and Swatantra', in G. Ram Reddy and B. A. V. Sharma (eds.), *State Government and Politics: Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi, 1979).

Maitra, Kiran, *Marxism in India: From Decline to Debacle* (New Delhi, 2012).

Majeed, Javed, 'Geographies of Subjectivity, Pan-Islam and Muslim Separatism: Muhammad Iqbal and Selfhood', in Shruti Kapila (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010), 133-149.

Malik, Iftikhar Haider, *Sikandar Hayat Khan (1892-1942): A Political Biography* (Islamabad, 1985).

Malik, Shiva N., *Seth Chhaju Ram: A Life With a Purpose, 1861-1943* (Hisar, 1994).

Manor, James, 'The Politics of Social Protection: The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh', in Louise Tillin, Rajeshwari Deshpande and K. K. Kailash (eds.), *Politics of Welfare: Comparisons Across Indian States* (New Delhi, 2015), 168-99.

Mantena, Karuna, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Main and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, 2010).

_ 'Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence', *The American Political Science Review*, 106, 2 (2012), 455-470.

_ 'On Gandhi's Critique of the State: Sources, Contexts, Conjunctures', *Modern Intellectual History*, 9, 3 (2012), 535-563.

Marcussen, Eleonor, *Acts of Aid: Politics of Relief and Reconstruction in the 1934 Bihar-Nepal Earthquake* (Cambridge, 2022).

Mason, Laura, 'The Thermidorian Reaction', in Peter McPhee (ed.), *A Companion to the French Revolution* (Chichester, 2013), 311-27.

McBriar, A. M., *Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884-1918* (Cambridge, 1962).

McDonald, G., 'Unity on Trial: Congress in Bihar, 1929-39', in *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-1947* (London, 1977), 289-314.

McGuire, John and Copland, Ian (eds.), *Hindu Nationalism and Governance* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2007).

McLane, John R., *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton, 1977).

_ 'Peasants, Money-Lenders and Nationalists At the End of the 19th Century', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1, 1 (1963), 66-73.

Mehrotra, S. R., 'The Politics Behind the Montagu Declaration of 1917', in C. H. Phillips (ed.), *Politics and Society in India* (London, 1963), 71-96.

Mehta, Shray and Sinha, Shreya, 'The Rise and Fall of Agrarian Populism in Post-Colonial India: Farmers' Movements and Electoral Politics at Crossroads', *Sociological Bulletin*, 71, 4 (2022), 601-18.

Mencher, Joan P., 'Problems in Analysing Rural Class Structure', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 9, 35 (1974), 1495-1503.

Menon, Dilip M., *Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900-1948* (Cambridge, 1994).

_ *The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India* (Pondicherry, 2006).

Menon, Nikhil, 'Gandhi's Spinning Wheel: The Charkha and Its Regenerative Effects', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 81, 4 (2020), 644-662.

Metcalf, Thomas R., *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1995).

— *Land, Landlords, and the British Raj: Northern India in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and London, 1979).

— 'Landlords Without Land: The U. P. Zamindars Today', *Pacific Affairs*, 40 (1967), 5-18.

Michelutti, Lucia, *The Vernacularisation of Democracy: Politics, Caste and Religion in India* (New Delhi, 2008).

— 'We (Yadavs) are a Caste of Politicians': Caste and Modern Politics in a North Indian Town', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 38, (1-2) (2000), 43-71.

Misra, Maria, *Business, Race, and Politics in British India, c.1850-1960* (Oxford, 1999).

— 'Sergeant-Major Gandhi: Indian Nationalism and Nonviolent 'Martiality'', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 73, 3 (2014), 689-709.

— 'The Indian Machiavelli: Pragmatism Versus Morality, and the Reception of the Arthashastra in India, 1905-2014', *Modern Asian Studies*, 50, 1 (2016), 310-344.

— *Vishnu's Crowded Temple: India Since the Great Rebellion* (London, 2007).

Mitchell, Lisa, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Bloomington, 2009).

Mitra, Chandra, 'Popular Uprising in 1942: The Case of Ballia', in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *The Indian Nation in 1942* (Calcutta, 1988), 165-184.

Moffat, Chris, *India's Revolutionary Inheritance: Politics and the Promise of Bhagat Singh* (Cambridge, 2019).

Moore, R. J., *Escape from Empire: The Attlee Government and the Indian Problem* (Oxford, 1983).

— *The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-1940* (Oxford, 1974).

Mowat, Charles Loch, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940* [1958] (London, 1968).

Mudde, Cas, 'Populism: An Ideational Approach', in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford, 2017), 27-47.

— and Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, 2017).

Mukherjee, Nilmani, *The Ryotwari System in Madras, 1792-1827* (Calcutta, 1962).

Mustafa, Seema, *The Lonely Prophet: V. P. Singh, A Political Biography* (New Delhi, 1995).

- Nair, Neeti, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Cambridge, MA, 2011).
- Nanda, B. R., *Motilal Nehru* [1964] (New Delhi, 1979).
- Nandan, Anikhet, and Santhosh, R., 'Associational Structures and Beyond: Evolution and Contemporary Articulations of Bhumihar Caste Associations in Bihar, India', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 33, 4 (2020), 667-8.
- Nadkarni, Mangesh Venkatesh, *Farmers' Movement in India* (Ahmedabad, 1987).
- Naseemullah, Adnan, 'The Political Economy of Economic Conservatism in India: From Moral Economy to Pro-Business Nationalism', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 5, 2 (2017), 233-47.
- _ and Chhibber, Pradeep, *Righteous Demagogues: Populist Politics in South Asia and Beyond* (New York, 2024).
- Neale, W. C., *Economic Change in Rural India: Land Tenure and Reform in Uttar Pradesh, 1800-1955* (New Haven, 1962).
- Niclas-Tölle, Boris, *The Socialist Opposition in Nehruvian India, 1947-1964* (Frankfurt am Main, 2015).
- Nielsen, Kenneth Bo and Nilsen, Alf Gunvald, 'India's Evolving Neoliberal Regime of Dispossession: From the Anti-SEZ Movement to the Farm Law Protests', *Sociological Bulletin*, 71, 4 (2022), 582-600.
- Nossiter, T. J., *Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation* (London, 1982).
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind, 'Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, 1 (1988), 189-224.
- Omvedt, Gail, 'We Want the Return for Our Sweat': The New Peasant Movement in India and the Formation of a National Agricultural Policy', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21, 3-4 (1994), 126-164.
- Oren, Stephen, 'The Sikhs, Congress and the Unionists in British Punjab, 1937-1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, 8, 3 (1974), 397-418.
- Orsini, Francesca, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2002).
- Overstreet, Gene D., and Windmiller, Marshall, *Communism in India* (Berkeley, 1959).
- Pagadala, Tejaswini, *India's Glocal Leader: Chandrababu Naidu* (New Delhi, 2018).
- Page, David, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control, 1920-1932* (New Delhi, 1982).
- Paï, Sudha, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Babujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh* (New Delhi, 2002).

Pandey, G. C., 'Swami Sahajanand and His World View: Some New Perspectives', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 71 (2010-2011), 677-87.

Pandey, Gyanendra, 'Introduction' in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *The Indian Nation in 1942* (Calcutta, 1988), 1-18.

_ 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919-1922', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I* (New Delhi, 1982), 143-197.

_ 'Rallying Around the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpuri Region, c.1888-1917', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II* (New Delhi, 1983), 60-129.

_ *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh: Class, Community and Nation in Northern India, 1920-40* (London, 2002).

Park, Richard Leonard, 'Indian Election Results', *Far Eastern Survey*, 21, 7 (1952), 61-70.

Patel, Raj, 'The Long Green Revolution', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 40, 1 (2013), 1-63.

Patnaik, Prabhat, 'Engels and the Worker-Peasant Alliance', *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 10, 1 (2021), 184-197.

Pinch, William R., *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley and London, 1996).

Pradhan, M. C., *The Political System of the Jats of Northern India* (London and Bombay, 1966).

Pradhan, Ramchandra, 'Introduction', in Ramchandra Pradhan (trans.), *The Struggle of My Life: Autobiography of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati* (New Delhi, 2018), xxiv-xxxvii.

Prakash, Gyan, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1990).

_ *Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy's Turning Point* (Princeton, 2019).

_ 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism', *The American Historical Review*, 99, 5 (1994), 1475-1490.

Prasad, Ramchandra and Sinha, A. K., *Sri Krishna Sinha: A Biography* (New Delhi, 1987).

Purushotham, Sunil, *From Raj to Republic: Sovereignty, Violence, and Democracy in India* (Stanford, 2021).

Radkey, Oliver H., *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism: Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, February to October 1917* (New York, 1958).

Raghavan, Srinath, *Indira Gandhi and the Years That Transformed India* (New Haven, 2025).

Raianu, Mircea, *Tata: The Global Corporation That Built Indian Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).

Rajagopal, Arvind, *Politics After Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public* (Cambridge, 2001),

- ‘The Rise of Hindu Populism in India’s Public Sphere’, *Current History*, 115, 780 (2016).
- Rajaraman, P., *The Justice Party: A Historical Perspective, 1916-37* (Madras, 1988).
- Ram, Mohan, ‘The Communist Movement in Andhra Pradesh’, in Paul R. Brass and Marcus F. Franda (eds.), *Radical Politics in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 281–321.
- Ram, Tika, *Sir Chhotu Ram: A Biography* [1946] (2nd ed., Hissar, 1979).
- Ramakumar, R. (ed.), *Distress in the Fields: Indian Agriculture After Liberalization* (New Delhi, 2022).
- Ramesh, Kandula, *Maverick Messiah: A Political Biography of N. T. Rama Rao* (Gurgaon, 2021).
- Ranjan, Nilanshu, *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati* (New Delhi, 2021).
- Rao, B. Sarveswara, *The Economic and Social Effects of Zamindari Abolition in Andhra* (New Delhi, 1963).
- Rao, Kilaru Purna Chandra, ‘N. G. Ranga: From Marxism to Liberalism’ in Parth Shah (ed.), *Profiles in Courage: Dissent on Indian Socialism* (New Delhi, 2001), 67-98.
- Rao, Yagati Chinna, ‘Caste and Class in Late Colonial Andhra: Dalits and Communist Mobilisation’, *Studies in People’s History*, 3, 1 (2016), 89-99.
- Rasam, V. P., *Swatantra Party: A Political Biography* (Nagpur, 1997).
- Rasul, M. A., *A History of the All-India Kisan Sabha* (Calcutta, 1974).
- Rathee, Anil Kumar and Nandal, D. S., *Sir Chhotu Ram and Punjab Economy Under Imperialism: Characteristics, Economic Development Programme(s), and Relevance to India’s Economic Development* (Rohtak, 1997).
- Ray, Prithwis Chandra, *Life & Times of C. R. Das* (London, 1927).
- Raza, Ali, *Revolutionary Pasts: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 2020).
- Reddy, D. Narasimha, and Mishra, Srijit (eds.), *Agrarian Crisis in India* (New Delhi, 2009).
- Reeves, P. D., ‘Changing Patterns of Political Alignment in the General Elections to the United Provinces Legislative Assembly, 1937 and 1946’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 5, 2 (1971), 111-142.
- *Landlords and Governments in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of their Relations until Zamindari Abolition* (Bombay and Oxford, 1991).
- ‘Landlords and Party Politics in the United Provinces, 1934-7’, in D. A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (London, 1968), 261-293.
- ‘The Congress and the Abolition of Zamindari in Uttar Pradesh’, *South Asia*, 8, 1-2 (1985), 154-167.

Robb, Peter, *Ancient Rights and Future Comfort: Bihar, the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, and British Rule in India* (Richmond, 1997).

— ‘The Challenge of Gau Mata: British Policy and Religious Change in India’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 2 (1986), 285-319.

Robinson, Francis, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces’ Muslims, 1860-1923* (London, 1974).

Robert, Jr. Bruce L., ‘Agricultural Credit Cooperatives in Madras, 1893-1937: Rural Development and Agrarian Politics in Pre-Independence India’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 16, 2 (1979), 163-184.

Rothermund, Dietmar, *Government, Landlord, and Peasant in India: Agrarian Relations Under British Rule* (Wiesbaden, 1978).

— *India in the Great Depression, 1929-1939* (New Delhi, 1992).

Roy, Srirupa, *The Political Outsider: Indian Democracy and the Lineages of Populism* (Stanford, 2024).

Roy, Tirthankar, *A Business History of India: Enterprise and the Emergence of Capitalism From 1700* (Cambridge, 2018).

Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago and London, 1987).

Runciman, David, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge, 1997).

Sanghatana, Stree Shakti, *‘We Were Making History’: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People’s Struggle* (New Delhi, 1989).

Sanyal, Sunanda and Basu, Soumya, *The Sickle and the Crescent: Communists, Muslim League and India’s Partition* (Kolkata and London, 2011).

Sarkar, Jayabrata, *Politics as a Social Text in India: The Babujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh* (New Delhi, 2021).

Sarkar, Sumit, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (New Delhi, 1983).

— ‘The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Cooperation, c.1905-22’, in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies III* (New Delhi, 1984), 271-320.

— *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi, 1973).

— *Writing Social History* (New Delhi, 1997).

Sarkar, Tanika, ‘Jitu Santal’s Movement in Malda, 1924-1932: A Study in Tribal Protest’, in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV* (New Delhi, 1985), 136-164.

Sartori, Andrew, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago, 2009).

– ‘Beyond Culture-Contact and Colonial Discourse: ‘Germanism’ in Colonial Bengal’, in Shruti Kapila (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010), 68-84.

– *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Berkeley, CA, 2014).

Schram, Stuart R., *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung* (London, 1988).

Scott, James C., *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven and London, 1976).

Sen, Abhijit, ‘Economic Liberalisation and Agriculture in India’, *Social Scientist*, 20, 1 (1992), 4-19.

Sengupta, Kalyan Kumar, ‘Agrarian Disturbances in 19th Century Bengal’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 8, 2 (1971), 192-212.

Seth, Sanjay, *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics: The Case of Colonial India* (New Delhi and India, 1995).

Shani, Ornit, ‘The Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India: The Case Study of Ahmedabad in the 1980s’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 39, 4 (2005), 861-896.

Shankar, Girja, *Socialist Trends in Indian National Movement: Being a Study of the Congress Socialist Party* (Meerut, 1987).

Sharma, Kaushal Kishore, *Agrarian Movements and Congress Politics in Bihar* (New Delhi, 1989).

Sharma, Raghav Sharan, *Swami Sabajanand Saraswati: 1889-1950* [2004] (New Delhi, 2022).

Sharma, Sadhna, *State Politics in India* (New Delhi, 1995).

Sharma, Shalini, ‘Yeh Azaadi Jhooti Hail’: The Shaping of the Opposition in the First Year of the Congress Raj’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 48, 5 (2014), 1358-1388.

Sherman, Taylor C., ‘A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism? Sarvodaya and Postcolonial Nationalism in India’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 53, 2 (2016), 249-270.

– *Nebru’s India: A History in Seven Myths* (Princeton, 2023).

Siddiqui, Sabah and Singh, Shamsher (eds.), *A People’s History of the Farmers’ Movement, 2020-2021* (Abingdon, 2025).

Siegel, Benjamin Robert, *Hungry Nation: Food, Famine, and the Making of Modern India* (Cambridge, 2018).

Singh, Ajit, ‘The State and Industrialization in India: Successes and Failures and the Lessons for the Future’, in Ha-Joon Chang and Robert Rowthorn (eds.), *The Role of the State in Economic Change* (Oxford, 1995), 170-186.

Singh, Hari, ‘Nationalist Politics and Rowlatt Satyagraha in Rohtak District (Haryana)’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 55 (1994), 515-521.

- Singh, K. Natwar, *Maharaja Suraj Mal 1707-1763: His Life and Times* (London, 1981).
- Singh, Lata, *Popular Translation of Nationalism: Bihar, 1920-1922* (New Delhi, 2012).
- Singh, Mohinder *The Akali Movement* (New Delhi, 1978).
- Singh, Navtej, *Starvation and Colonialism: A Study of Famines in the Nineteenth Century British Punjab, 1858-1901* (New Delhi, 1996).
- Singh, R. B., 'Environmental Consequences of Agricultural Development: A Case Study from the Green Revolution State of Haryana, India', *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment*, 82, 1 (2000), 97-103.
- Singh, Ram, *Mulayam Singh: A Political Biography* (New Delhi, 1998).
- Singh, Sangeeta, Menon, Minakshi, Dutta, Pradeep Kumar, Pati, Biswamoy, Barik, Radhakanta, Chopra, Raadhika, Dutta, Partha and Prasad, Sanjay, 'Subaltern Studies II: A Review Article', *Social Scientist*, 12, 10 (1984), 3-41.
- Singh, Yashpal, 'Contribution of Haryana in Non-Cooperation Movement', *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 8, 1 (2023), 81-2.
- Skaria, Ajay, 'Homeless in Gujarat and India: On the Curious Love of Indulal Yagnik', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 38, 3 (2001), 271-298.
- _ *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wilderness in Western India* (New Delhi, 1999).
- _ *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi's Religion of Resistance* (Minneapolis, 2016).
- Skinner, Quentin, *Visions of Politics*, 3. Vols (Cambridge, 2002).
- Smith, Vincent A., *The Oxford History of India*, revised by Percival Spear (New Delhi and New York, 1981).
- Sohal, Amar, *The Muslim Secular: Parity and the Politics of India's Partition* (Oxford, 2023).
- Som, Reba, *Differences Within Consensus: The Left and Right in Congress, 1929-39* (London, 1995).
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago, 1988), 271-313.
- _ 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV* (New Delhi, 1985), 330-63.
- Spodek, Howard, 'Pluralist Politics in British India: The Cambridge Cluster of Historians of Modern India', *The American Historical Review*, 84, 4 (1979), 688-707.
- Srinivas, S. V., 'Making of a Peasant Industry: Telugu Cinema in the 1930s-1950s', *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies*, 1, 2 (2010), 169-188

- Stoddart, Brian, 'The Structure of Congress Politics in Coastal Andhra, 1925-37', in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-1947* (London, 1977), 109-32.
- Stokes, Eric, 'Northern and Central India', in Dharma Kumar and Meghnad Desai (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1983), 36-86.
- *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959).
- *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1978).
- *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857* (Oxford, 1986).
- 'The Return of the Peasant to South Asian History', *South Asia*, 6, 1 (1976), 96-111.
- Stone, Ian, *Canal Irrigation in British India: Perspectives on Technological Change in a Peasant Economy* (Cambridge, 1984).
- Subramanian, Narendra, 'Populism in India', *The SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 27, 1 (2007), 81-91.
- Sundarayya, Puccalapalli, *Telangana People's Struggle and its Lessons* (Calcutta, 1972).
- Suthar, Sudhir Kumar and Kumar, Manish, 'Contemporary Farmer's Movements in India: Hybrid Political Agenda and Modernisation of Protests', *Sociological Bulletin*, 71, 4 (2022), 495-511.
- Taggart, Paul A., *Populism* (Buckingham, 2000).
- Talbot, I. A., 'Deserted Collaborators: The Political Background to the Rise and Fall of the Punjab Unionist Party, 1923-1947', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 11, 1 (1982), 73-93.
- *Khizr Tiwana: The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Karachi and Oxford, 2002).
- *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement: The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India* (Karachi and Oxford, 1988).
- 'The Punjab Under Colonialism: Order and Transformation in British India', *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 14 (2007), 3-10.
- Tanwar, Raghuvendra, *Politics of Sharing Power: The Punjab Unionist Party, 1923-47* (New Delhi, 1999).
- Tarlo, Emma, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi* (London, 2003).
- Tejani, Shabnum, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950* (Bloomington, 2008).
- Thachil, Tariq, *Elite Parties, Poor Voters: How Social Services Win Votes in India* (Cambridge, 2014).

- Thompson, E. P., 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136.
- Torrance, David, *The Wild Men: The Remarkable Story of Britain's First Labour Government* (London, 2024).
- Toshkov, Alex, *Agrarianism as Modernity in 20th Century Europe: The Golden Age of the Peasantry* (London, 2019).
- Truschke, Audrey, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford, 2017).
- Ullah, Ata, *The Co-operative Movement in the Punjab* (London, 1937).
- Upadhyay, Carol Boyack, 'The Farmer-Capitalists of Coastal Andhra Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23, 27 (1988), 1376-1382.
- Upadhyay, Shashi Bhushan, 'Premchand and the Moral Economy of Peasantry in Colonial North India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45, 5 (2011), 1227-1259.
- Upton, Robert E., 'It Gives Us a Power and Strength Which We Do Not Possess': Martiality, Manliness, and India's Great War Enlistment Drive', *Modern Asian Studies*, 52, 6 (2018).
- *The Thought of Bal Gangadhar Tilak: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford, 2024).
- Van den Dungen, P. H. M., *The Punjab Tradition: Influence and Authority in Nineteenth-Century India* (London, 1972).
- Van der Veer, Peter, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley and London, 1994).
- Varshney, Ashutosh, *Democracy, Development, and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India* (Cambridge, 1995).
- 'Ideas, Interests and Institutions in Policy Change: Transformation of India's Agricultural Strategy in the Mid-1960s', *Policy Sciences*, 22, 3/4 (1989), 289-323.
- 'Mass Politics or Elite Politics? India's Economic Reforms in Comparative Perspective', *The Journal of Policy Reform*, 2, 4 (1988), 301-355.
- and Ayyangar, Srikrishna, Swaminathan, Siddarth, 'Populism and Hindu Nationalism in India', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 56, (2021), 197-222.
- Venkatarangaiya, Mamidipudi, *The Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh*, 4 Vols. (Hyderabad, 1965-74).
- Verma, A. K., 'Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39, 14/15 (2004), 1509-1514.
- Verma, D. C., *Sir Chhotu Ram: Life and Time* (New Delhi, 1981).

Wagner, Kim A., *Amritsar 1919: An Empire of Fear & The Making of a Massacre* (New Haven, 2019).

Waikar, Namita, *Farmers' Protest: Why the Indian Farmers Went on Strike* (Melbourne, 2025).

Wallace, Paul, 'Peasant Mobilization in India and the Contemporary Political Significance of Sir Chhotu Ram', *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 41, 4 (1980), 683-693.

Washbrook, David, 'Country Politics: Madras 1880 to 1930', *Modern Asian Studies*, 7, 3 (1973), 475-531.

— *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1976).

Weiner, Myron, 'Congress Restored: Continuities and Discontinuities in Indian Politics', *Asian Survey*, 22, 4 (1982), 339-355.

— *Party Building in a New Nation: The Indian National Congress* (Chicago, 1967).

— *Party Politics in India: The Development of a Multi-Party System* (Princeton, 1957).

— 'The 1971 Elections and the Indian Party System', *Asian Survey*, 11, 12 (1971), 1153-1166.

— 'The 1977 Parliamentary Elections in India', *Asian Survey*, 17, 7 (1977), 619-626.

Whitcombe, Elizabeth, 'Whatever Happened to the Zamindars?' in E. J. Hobsbawm, Witold Kula, Ashok Mitra, K. N. Raj and Ignacy Sachs (ed.), *Peasants in History: Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner* (Calcutta, 1980), 156-80.

Wielenga Dietrich, Karuna, *Weaving Histories: The Transformation of the Handloom Industry in South India, 1800-1960* (Oxford, 2020).

Wilson, Jon E., 'Anxieties of Distance: Codification in Early Colonial Bengal', in Shruti Kapila (ed.), *An Intellectual History for India* (New Delhi, 2010), 1-17.

Witsoe, Jeffrey, *Democracy Against Development: Lower-Caste Politics and Political Modernity in Postcolonial India* (Chicago and London, 2013).

Visana, Vikram, *Uncivil Liberalism: Labour, Capital and Commercial Society in Dadabhai Naoroji's Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2022).

Wolf, Eric R., *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1969).

Yadav, K. C., *Chaudhari Devi Lal: A Political Biography* (Gurgaon [sic], 2002).

— *Elections in Punjab, 1920-1947* (New Delhi, 1987).

Yang, Anand A., *Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Bihar* (Berkeley, 1998).

— *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India: Saran District, 1793-1920* (Berkeley and London, 1989).

Yong, Tan Tai, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi and London, 2005).

Zachariah, Benjamin, *Developing India: An Intellectual and Social History* (New Delhi and Oxford, 2005).

— *Nehru* (London, 2004).

Zaman, Faridah, 'Beyond Nostalgia: Time and Place in Indian Muslim Politics', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27, 4 (2017), 627-647.

Secondary Works in Hindi

Chaudhary, V. C. P., 'Bhumika' ['Introduction'] in V. C. P. Chaudhary (ed.), *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati: Omkar se Hunkar Tak* [*Swami Sahajanand Saraswati: From Religious Contemplation to Militant Activism*] (Patna, 1990), ix-xxii.

Pandey, Vaidyanath, *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati: Vyaktitva evam Krtitva* [*Swami Sahajanand Saraswati: Life and Works*] (Allahabad, 1997).

Sharma, Raghav Sharan, 'Bhumika' ['Introduction'] in Raghav Sharan Sharma (ed.), *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati Rachnawali* [*Selected Works of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati*], vol. 1 [2003] (New Delhi, 2010), 7-41.

Sharma, Ram Chandra, 'Mere Chacha, Unke Gaam' ['My Uncle, His Village'] in V. C. P. Chaudhary (ed.), *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati: Omkar se Hunkar Tak* [*Swami Sahajanand Saraswati: From Religious Contemplation to Militant Activism*] (Patna, 1990), 23-8.

Shastri, Raghuvir Singh, *Chaudhary Chhotu Ram: Jeevan-Charit* [*Chaudhary Chhotu Ram: Biography*] (Rohtak, 1965).

Unpublished Dissertations

Bajaj, Y. P., 'Sir Chhotu Ram and his Work', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kurukshetra University, 1972).

Bhabha, Maneck Kharshedji, 'The Famine of 1899-1900 and the Government of India', (Unpublished M.Litt. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1974).

Cavale, Karthik Rao, 'The Production of Rurality: Social and Spatial Transformations in the Tamil Countryside, 1915-65', (Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2020).

Clibbens, Patrick, 'The Indian Emergency, 1975-77', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2014).

Crane, Robert I., 'The Indian National Congress and the Indian Agrarian Problem, 1919-1939', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1951).

Gangopadhyay, Agnibho, 'Biography of a Pseudonym: Suprakash Ray, Bengal (1915-1990)', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2018).

- Jan, Ammar Ali, 'A Study in the Formation of Communist Thought in India, 1919-1951', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2018).
- Johnson, Michael H., 'The Relation Between Land Settlement and Party Politics in Uttar Pradesh, India, 1950-69, with Special Reference to the Formation of the BKD', (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 1975).
- Kaur, Gurpreet, 'Development of Higher Education in Colonial Punjab', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2021).
- Kumar, Parveen, 'Ideology, Action and Legacy: A Study of Chhotu Ram', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kurukshetra University, 2015).
- Masani, Zareer, 'Radical Nationalism in India, 1930-42: The Role of the All India Congress Socialist Party', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1976).
- Pandey, Anshuman, 'Recasting the Brahmin in Medieval Mithila: Origins of Caste Identity among the Maithil Brahmins of North Bihar', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2014).
- Price, Dara Milnes, 'Through District Eyes: Local Raj and the Myth of the Punjab Tradition in British India, 1858-1907', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2005).
- Reddy Prasad Preddy B., 'Anti-Zamindari Struggles in Andhra: Rural Politics During the 1930s and 1940s', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Hyderabad, 1993).
- Rusch, Thomas A., 'Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress, 1931-1942', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1955).
- Sawkar, Smriti, 'The Resurrection of Durga: Indira Gandhi's Spectacular Politics in the 1980s', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2018).
- Sharma, Hanuman Parshad, 'The Unionist Party in Punjab (1923-47)', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Maharshi Dayanand University, 1989).
- Sharma, P. D., 'Swatantra Party in Gujarat - Rise, Growth and Decline (1960 to 1972)', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Gujarat University, 1976).
- Singh, Ravinder, 'Re-Examining the Role of Sir Chhotu Ram in the South-East Punjab', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2019).
- Tulika, Amrita, 'An Intellectual Biographical Sketch of a Peasant Leader, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, 1889-1950', (Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1986).
- Upadhyaya, Carol Boyack, 'From Kulak to Capitalist: The Emergence of a New Business Community in Coastal Andhra Pradesh, India', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1988).
- Yadav, Bhupender, 'Aspects of the Unionist Party in Punjab Politics, 1923-30', (Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1989).

Zaman, Faridah, 'Futurity and the Political Thought of North Indian Muslims, c.1900-1925', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2015).