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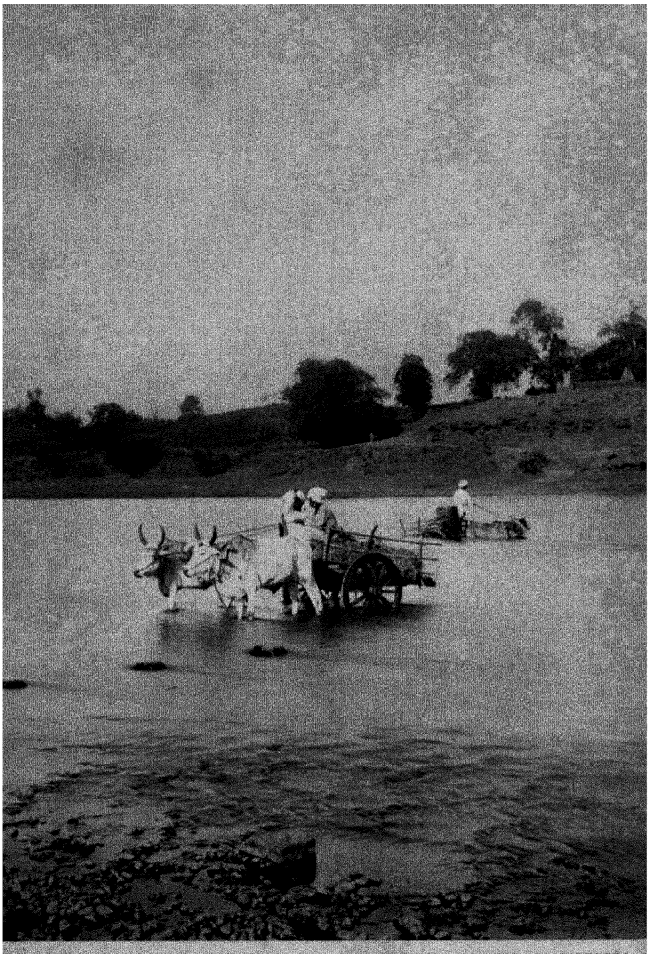

FORDING A RIVER DURING THE RAINS IN THE UNITED PROVINCES

THE INDIAN PEASANT

AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

(The Linlithgow Commission and After)

BY

N. GANGULEE

C.I.E., Ph D., formerly Professor of Agriculture and Rural Economics, University of Calcutta (1921-1931) Ex-member of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture (1926-1928), Member, Imperial Council of Agricultural Research (1929-1931), Member, Governing Body of International Institute of Educational Cinematography (1932)

With a Foreword by

SIR STANLEY REED, K.B.E.

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His Majesty the King-Emperor's words in opening the First Round Table Conference, 1930 :

'The material conditions which surround the lives of my subjects in India affect me keenly . . .'

TO

THOSE WHO MAY BE CALLED UPON TO UNDERSTAND THE MASS-MAN OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE AND HELP HIM OVERCOME THE INERTIA THAT STERILIZES HIS CREATIVE LIFE, THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost

When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost

Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowliest, and lost.

TAGORE

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PREFACE

AT a recent meeting of the East India Association, London, Sir Daniel Hamilton, in the course of the discussion that followed the reading of a paper entitled ' India's Prosperity : the Rupee and the Reserve Bank Bill ', made an observation which should be made known to everyone concerned with Indian questions. He said : ' Who is India ? Lord Linlithgow, Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, in his brochure, *The Indian Peasant*, says that "it may be said with truth that the ryot is India ". Yes, the ryot is India and India is the ryot : and, as Lord Curzon said in his farewell speech when he left the shores of India, " the ryot should be the first and final object of every Viceroy's regard ", and so must he be the first and final regard of the Joint Parliamentary Committee and India's Reserve Bank Bill. But is he ? No, the ryot has been forgotten : he has been left out in the cold.' Sir Daniel has a large estate in Bengal and is in intimate touch with the peasantry ; and his views are at least as important as those of ' men on the spot '.

Sir Frederick Sykes, ex-Governor of Bombay, admits that ' in the discussions upon the Indian question too little weight has been given to rural reconstruction and economic improvement, which are really the basis upon which everything rests '.

But the symptoms of agrarian discontent are so conspicuous a feature in India today that the legitimate claims of the peasantry can no longer be subordinated to the interests of the propertied and educated classes.

If I may be permitted to use the analogy of an earthquake, the epicentrum of convulsion that may shake India lies not in sporadic movements organized by the discontented middle-classes, but in the slow awakening of the Indian masses. The incubus of a medieval socio-religious life is being perceptibly exorcised by the impact of economic forces; the crust of their mental inertia that accumulated through centuries is breaking out and they are becoming conscious of the circumstances that affect their welfare. All this is a hopeful sign and may accelerate the process of modernization in a medieval society composed of heterogeneous elements. The time has therefore come for readjusting the rural economy in relation to the needs of the vast majority of the Indian population

In recent years there have been several enquiries into the problems of Indian rural economy undertaken by official and non-official agencies. Poverty, low standard of living, bad sanitation, malnutrition, ill-health, inadequate means of communication and transport and a medieval social structure—these are some of the outstanding features of the Indian countryside. Their continuance is largely due to certain fundamental deficiencies in rural economy and to the widespread illiteracy of the population.

The prosperity and development of a country are ultimately dependent upon two factors, namely, the natural resources the country possesses and the capacity for utilizing them to the best advantage. The wealth of India's natural resources is vast and yet the poverty of the bulk of her people is phenomenal. The economic development so far achieved has been neutralized by an increase of population under the stress of which the standard of living is being lowered. For an expanding population the preponderance of agriculture as a means of livelihood is bound to give rise to unbalanced economy. The census returns from 1891 to 1931 show that the proportion of the population depending directly upon

' Pasture and Agriculture ' has steadily increased. The figures are :

1891	. .. ..	61 per cent
1901	.. .. ..	66 per cent
1911	.. .. ..	72 per cent
1921	. .. ..	73 per cent
1931	.. .. ..	71 per cent[1]

In several ways this excessive pressure of population on arable land reacts upon the rural economy. One baneful result is the evil of sub-division and fragmentation of land which reduces the size of holdings, in some congested areas, into tiny irregular plots. Any advance in improved technique is almost impossible so long as agricultural land remains divided into uneconomic holdings. Under-employment of cultivator, agrarian unsettlement, growth of the landless agricultural labourer class, and increase of agricultural indebtedness —these are some of the inevitable consequences of defective rural economy confused by the prevailing land system.

Broadly speaking, the Indian land system may be divided into two main classifications : *ryotwari*, where the land revenue is assessed directly upon the cultivator subject to periodical revision ; and *zemindari* where the assessment is fixed in perpetuity with hereditary rent-collectors. The latter system was regarded by the early British administrators as ' a measure which was effected to naturalize the landed institutions of England among the natives of Bengal ',[2] and was extended to Madras. About 53 per cent of the land is held under the ryotwari system and in 47 per cent there is a heterogenous collection of intermediaries, known as landlords, between the cultivator and the State.

---

[1] In the 1931 census several changes were made as regards the collection and presentation of occupational statistics.

[2] *Men and Events of My Time in India*, by Sir Richard Temple.

Both forms of land settlement have given rise to a number of complicated problems. For instance, in the *ryotwari* tracts there has been a steady increase of rent-receivers with the result that the cultivating proprietors are becoming cultivating tenants. In the Punjab alone the number of rent-receivers has increased during the last decade from 626,000 to 1,008,000. Similar change is taking place in other provinces. In the *zemindari* tracts, there has been a remarkable growth of numerous intervening interests between the actual cultivator and the superior landlord. The landlords and these intermediaries reap the benefit of the rise in agricultural prices and of such land improvements as may be effected either by their tenants or by public bodies. The land revenue of Bengal represents about 4 per cent of the value of the produce. A nation, dependent mainly upon agriculture, cannot prosper if the interests of the landholders and cultivators are not reconciled. One of the urgent problems that should arrest the attention of the future Government of India is to bring about this adjustment. Land reform will lay the real foundations of rural reconstruction and also of a democratic State, and the peasant proprietors will provide the State with a new source of strength.

The primitive form of agriculture and consequential defective rural economy coupled with the backward state of social life are largely responsible for increasing indebtedness among the peasantry and rural artisans. In some parts of India, the money-lenders have reduced their clients to the position of economic servitude and have become landholders. Recent investigations show that only a small percentage of the rural population belonging to the poorest classes of cultivators is free from debt. The existence of a heavy burden of debt thus results in loss of agricultural efficiency and impedes agricultural progress.

But it has been truly said that ' agriculture is not merely a branch of production ; it is a mode of life '.

No impartial observer can fail to notice the depressing conditions of *life* in Indian villages. In addition to the dominating feature of poverty, there is the prison-house of a medieval social structure within which the villagers live. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the old village community had decayed ; and, when about a century later attempts were made to introduce local self-government with a view to reviving local bodies, the problem appeared to be almost baffling. And yet so long as local bodies do not properly function, there can be no hope of any success either in rural reconstruction or in the establishment of democratic forms of government. The absence of effective local bodies is largely responsible for meagre results derived from the activities of what are known as the Nation-building Departments.

Sanitation and health in rural areas are in a deplorable state. Disease has reduced the expectation of life in India to less than half what it is in countries like Great Britain. The neglect of public health may be the most costly of economies. ' Economic wastage due to disease ', observed the Linlithgow Commission, ' cannot be over-exaggerated. Malaria slays its thousands and lowers the economic efficiency of hundreds of thousands ; plague and cholera sweep the country from time to time ; hookworm disease, *kala-azar* and diseases arising from diet deficiency insidiously reduce the labour power of the cultivating classes. Unprotected wells and tanks, unswept village streets, close pent windows excluding all ventilation—in such conditions does the average villager live.'

There are various causes for the prevalence of preventable diseases in India, but none is so potent as the widespread illiteracy. It is not easy to improve the rural environment in a country where about three million women and twenty million men may be classified as literate, in accordance with the census standard, out of a total population of 353 millions.

In recent years the problems of improving rural environment are forcing themselves upon the attention of the Government and the public ; but what is needed is bold initiative for a concerted action. Mere social efforts by a few non-official agencies or even by the official departments are not adequate for the purpose of uplifting the masses from their present state of existence. The Government and the Indian legislatures can no longer indulge in acquiescence in things as they are in rural life and labour. Land reform, re-organization of credit facilities, mass-education, improved sanitation and effective local bodies—these are the urgent needs of those who live in the Indian countryside. The deep chasms between the different social strata have to be removed before India can aspire to attain an independent status in the British Commonwealth of Nations.

In the present volume some of the problems that confront the Indian countryside and its inhabitants are discussed. Since 1910 I have had opportunities of being closely associated with Indian rural life and of studying its problems. In 1926-8, the opportunity came to me as a member of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture to see in every province in British India the work of the administrative organizations concerned with the welfare and prosperity of the rural population. In the course of the tours time was also found to pay a number of visits to the villages and to inspect certain rural welfare centres run by non-official agencies. The extracts from my journal kept during this period and a *selection* of letters written to several persons ever since I began studying Indian agricultural and rural problems are now made available to the public at a time when far-reaching changes in the constitutional machinery of British India are contemplated. For the convenience of the reader I have tried to classify these extracts and letters, indicating the main topic they deal with, into five chapters. In the last chapter I have included a number

of letters on the constitutional problems in relation to rural India.

If this book serves to stimulate public interest in matters concerning the social and material improvement of Indian rural population, I shall feel amply rewarded.

I am indebted to Lady Mackenna, Sir Thomas Middleton, the Indian Railway Bureau and the Department of Agriculture, Bengal, for the photographs reproduced in the book. I have been especially glad to be able to include a photograph of Sir Ganga Ram. His life-work was devoted to practical improvements for the benefit of the Punjab Peasant

My grateful acknowledgement is due to the Raja Sahib of Parlakimedi, a member of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture, for his generous assistance in the publication of the book. I also owe my sincere thanks to my friends and to the Editors of the *Statesman*, *Pioneer* and *Englishman* for their courtesy in permitting the inclusion in this volume of letters that were originally addressed to them.

N. GANGULEE

London,
November 1934

FOREWORD

PROFESSOR GANGULEE'S book appears at an opportune moment. Great constitutional changes in India are pending. The precise form of those is not germane to our present purpose, save in this—whatever their ultimate shape they will involve a transfer of authority to Indian hands. It is essential that we should seek promptly to determine the economic and social objectives of this new power.

My own conviction, based on thirty-five years' experience of India, associated not only with politics, but with industry through the direction of great joint stock companies, and the agricultural interest through active connexion with a Co-operative Credit apex bank, is that the great problem confronting India is the correct adjustment of the relations between the manufacturing and agricultural interests. Under the present constitution, and indeed ever since the introduction of the elective element in the legislatures more than half a century ago, the urban element has dominated politics. The voice of the cultivator is not heard in the land. Yet he represents nearly seventy-five per cent. of the Indian people. Everyone pays lip service to the ryot, save a handful of distinguished civilians, no-one is jealous of his interests. The industrialist is supreme; only recently it was nakedly contended in the legislature that the consumer must pay for manufacturing development, and that too by those who profess to speak for the masses of the Indian community.

Let me not be thought either to decry or to minimize the value of industrial growth. Apart from its contribution to the national wealth it is of vital importance to a land subject to violent eccentricities in the rainfall. That was brought vividly home to me twenty-five years ago. It was

my misfortune to tour extensively in the areas affected by the famine of 1896-7, and again in the ghastly calamity of 1899-1900. I was an appalled witness of the dislocation of the social structure caused by a rainless year, and of the dreadful loss of human life from cholera and malaria falling on these wasted frames. Ten years later I toured the same districts of fertile Gujarat when the monsoon failed with almost equal completeness. I found that the absorption of a considerable body of workers in the new manufacturing industries, with the money power of their wages, broke the shock so effectively that large relief works were not required.

But manufacturing industry in the East can be an unlovely thing, though the lesson of Japan shows that it is not necessarily so. I am conservative enough to feel that a slower tempo, whilst a quicker appreciation of the needs of providing adequately for an agricultural people divorced from their hereditary craft for urban work develops, would not be a bad thing. The need for proportion however goes deeper. If by concentration on manufacturing industry the countryside is neglected, it seems inevitable that with the divorce of capital and brains from the soil, food prices must rise and the last stage of manufacturing industry become worse than the first. Also, if the exploitation of the rural community for hothouse forcing of manufacturing industry continues, we may well arouse such a volume of agrarian discontent as to shake the foundations of Indian society.

Fortunately the first fruits of a new spirit are before us. It was largely due to Professor Gangulee's determined insistence that the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture was constituted. Unfortunately its inquiries were so protracted, and its Report so monumental, that amid the din of political strife, it has been neglected. It is rather characteristic of India that the small sum set aside to carry into effect some of the recommendations of the Commission should be largely lost in the dry husk of administrative expenses.

The bones are stirring. The devoted work of Mr. and Mrs. Brayne in the Gurgaon District of the Punjab has shown what village uplift can do. Mr. Gandhi has discovered the village, and some of his lieutenants are proposing to exploit it for revolutionary purposes. In the Budget for the current year provision has been made for rural reconstruction, and the seeds have been sown but will have to be tenderly watched if they are to ripen. The work is too vast for any unofficial agency, save to point the way, it demands the full support of the governments of the day and of all social reformers.

As for the remedies, reference must be made to Dr. Gangulee's pages. They are perhaps the more arresting because they represent his day to day experience of rural life and problems. The first essential is a drastic reform of the land laws, so as to consolidate holdings and prevent their re-partition into tiny fragments. It has been estimated that by this measure alone, without any increase of the labour and capital put into the soil, the annual output would be doubled. The mighty horde of rent-takers, who contribute nothing to agricultural improvement, is a tremendous drain on the land. The provision of capital is a more thorny subject. Everybody throws bricks at the money-lender, but experienced District Officers know his value as the main provider of capital. It seems to me that the problem is not so much the provision of credit facilities as the development of the capacity wisely to use credit. In the Bombay Central Co-operative Bank we could get all the money we required and more ; our difficulty was to secure that loans were devoted to constructive purposes. Constant complaint is made of the miserable quality of Indian cattle, especially when kept for the dairy. How can there be an improvement in a land where fodder supplies are limited when numbers of useless beasts are kept half-alive from religious or sentimental ideals ? These points are mentioned, almost at random, to show that however strong the Government may be, however resolute in the determination to legislate if need be in advance of public opinion, it must

be hamstrung unless supported by the dynamic energy of social reform.

Dr. Gangulee touches on the prevention of disease. The ravages of malaria and hookworm are less apparent in the death-rate than in the continuous sapping of the vitality of the people. Here we are insistently confronted by a problem of arresting magnitude. According to the last census the population of India is increasing at the rate of over three millions a year. No one will contend that the expansion of production, even making full allowance for the development of irrigation in Sind, the Punjab, the United Provinces and Madras, has kept pace with this colossal increase, or that any expansion of production within the power of any government can march *pari passu* with such a population growth. It is a question then of not of improving, but even of maintaining the present standard of living, especially if there is such a rise in the prices of agricultural commodities as is essential to the existence of the rural community. A great danger facing India is, in the words of a recent student—that this unchecked growth of the population threatens the degeneration of India into a vast rural slum. Political institutions are capable of adjustment; populations move with the irresistible force of a glacier. Here is a situation which gives all who seek to serve India food for intensive thought.

STANLEY REED

London,
April 1935

that an experiment on such lines may be undertaken here in his estate. The destruction of the indigenous economic structure is so complete that I feel that the task of reconstruction seems almost hopeless; but in any case, no piecemeal efforts would succeed in reviving rural Bengal. Our first step, however, must be in the direction of creating public opinion in favour of such drastic measures as are required in order to arrest the process of disintegration of Bengal rural life.

Of these measures, perhaps the most essential one would be to modify that strange sort of local government which divided responsibility, transforming its officials into a hierarchy. The chairman, who is the district magistrate, has, in reality, more power than the body he presides over, and the non-official members are generally quite submissive servants of the provincial Government. As far as I can see, the village communities are not invested with those elements of authority without which you cannot re-vitalize them. Alas, all this is perhaps crying in the wilderness. . . .

Another important change necessary is in the existing systems of land tenures. My lessons in the various complications in regard to ownership of land in Bengal began in the secretariat of the Tagore estate; but I must confess I have not so far understood this tremendous tangle that coils around the Bengal land tenures. However, it seems clear to me, that it is not based on the social system of our villages and cannot but injure the agricultural interests of the county.

The introduction of scientific methods in agricultural operations and of better organizations for farm credit and marketing is necessary and helpful, but these are, at best, palliative measures. I feel there must be a determined effort to solve our agrarian problems. It is my intention to make a thorough study of the processes by which our land tenure systems have become so complicated.

The young Tagore is planning to organize an agricultural station here and has already arranged a farm for experimental purposes. One of the large rooms in his house will be made into a laboratory.

While there is a vast field for agricultural research in this country, I am rather sceptical about any marked success in the employment of scientific methods upon small-scale farming. We have to study carefully the economic aspects of agriculture and understand the character of rural life and labour.

2

Santiniketan (Bengal)
(1915)

To an English friend in India.

Your love for the Santals has deeply touched me, and I cannot resist the temptation of writing to you about this simple, unsophisticated people. During my visit to the Ashram after my return from America, I saw a number of Santals working there. What struck me was their good physique as compared to Bengali Hindu cultivators. Majumdar[1] is very interested in the life of Santals. He took me to see one of their tribal festivities, called Bahapuja, celebrated when the Sal-trees[2] are in blossom. Their rhythmic dancing of men and women to flute-music is quaint but fascinating. Hard-working people these Santals are.

Considerable areas in the districts of Birbhum, Midnapore, Manbhum and Bankura have been brought under cultivation by the Santals. But after they break the virgin land and cultivate for two or three years, they are either dispossessed of their holdings or reduced to a position similar to the serfdom of the

[1] A teacher in Tagore's seminar.

[2] *Shorea robusta*, L.

bhadralog. The Santals are unsuspecting. Round about Santiniketan you can see what is happening. The dry uplands are brought into cultivation with infinite patience and care—then come the landlords with *their* terms of settlement! I want you to ascertain how the Santals become victims to the wiles of Bengali petty landlords and unscrupulous Marwari traders. The exploitation of the Santals has been going on for some time, the tragic history of which is related in the McAlpin report. The Government of Bengal put one of their ablest officers to enquire into the condition of the Santals and to suggest measures for their betterment. It was a very able report, but the Government have not taken action on it as yet. Perhaps they are waiting for another Santal rebellion! (These humble people rose in revolt in 1885.) I addressed a letter to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* drawing the attention of the Government to their neglect of the McAlpin Report, but the editor has not so far taken any notice of it.

I am asking Majumdar to help you understand the caste organization of the Santals. The village mandal is still the arbiter in all social and religious matters. The Santal does not usually rush to the Courts to settle disputes with a member of his community. Against the decision of the Mandal, there is an appeal to the Parganait, who, assisted by four elected members of the community, holds his court once a year at the hunting season. You should arrange to attend these functions, and please write about them in the *Modern Review*.

My stay here is uncertain. I may have to go to Ramgarh where the Poet has purchased a small garden with a bungalow. You see, I cannot make my own plans. Although it is so difficult to concentrate one's mind upon any solid work in an atmosphere of uncertainty, I have been reading a lot in preparation for writing a short treatise on Indian rural economics.

3

Ramgarh (U.P.)
(1916)

To an English friend in India.

Before leaving Santiniketan I wrote to you about the circumstances that forced me to abandon my plans there. It is now decided that I should lay out an orchard in a garden recently purchased by Tagore. What I like about the place is the bracing climate. You should make this place your summer resort.

About three years ago when I was residing in a Bengal village, Professor G. Lowes Dickinson kindly spent two days with us. I believe I told you about the things he said and the views he expressed on the life and labour of the villagers. Since then he has published his notes of travel in which a little chapter is devoted to his visit to Shelida, from which I make the following extract :

'Over ruined shrines of red brick, elaborately carved, clambered and twined the sacred peepul tree. And within a more modern building were housed images of Krishna and Radha, and other symbols of what we call too hastily idolatry. Outside, a circular platform of brick where these dolls are washed in milk at the great festivals of the year. . . . By the time we reached the house it was dusk A lamp was brought into the porch. Musicians and singers squatted on the floor. Behind them a white-robed crowd faded into the night. And we listened to hymns composed by the village saint, who had lately passed away.

' First there was a prayer for forgiveness. " Lord, forgive us our sins. You *must* forgive, for you are called the merciful. And it's so easy for you ! And if you don't, what becomes of your reputation ? " Next a call to the ferry. " Come and cross over with me. Krishna is the boat and Radha the sail. No storms can wreck us. Come, cross over with me " Then a prayer for deliverance from the " well " of the world, where we are imprisoned by those dread foes the five senses of the mind. Then a rhapsody on God, invisible, incomprehensible. " He speaks, but He is not seen. He lives in the room with me, but I cannot find Him. He brings to market His moods, but the marketer never appears. Some call Him fire, some

ether. But I ask His name in vain. I suppose I am such a fool that they will not tell it me." Lastly, a mystic song, how Krishna has plunged into the ocean of Radha ; how he is there drifting, helpless and lost. Can we not save him ? But no ! It is because his love is not perfect and pure. And that is why he cannot be incarnated again and again in the avatars.

' Are these people idolaters, these dignified old men, these serious youths, these earnest, grave musicians ? Look at their temple, and you say "Yes". Listen to their hymns, and you say " No ".'

In the evening, after dinner, we had a long conversation together on the nature and extent of the influence the Hindu faiths exercised upon the masses. I tried to explain to him that it would be a hasty judgement on our part if we attributed the prevailing mental inertia of our masses solely to the religious cults ; that the utter hopelessness of extricating themselves from the conditions under which they live was, indeed, an important contributing factor to their dismal outlook.

S. explained to him the beauties of symbols worshipped by the Hindus and suggested their importance in our cultural and aesthetic development. The next morning I took him to visit a village school run by the Tagore estate. The Professor writes : ' a mud floor, mud lined walls, all scrupulously clean ; and squatting round the four sides children of all ages, all reciting their lessons at once, and all the lessons different. They were learning to read and write their native language, and that, at least, seemed harmless enough ! But parents complained that it unfitted them for the fields. " Our fathers did not do it "—that, said my impatient young host (I must say I took this as a compliment to me ; one really becomes impatient when the difficulties in the way of rural reforms appear almost insurmountable), is their reply to every attempt to reform.'

After lunch we set out in palanquins for the nearest railway station. ' The bearers ', writes this great Englishman, ' sung a rhythmic chant as they bore us smoothly along through mustard and pulses, yellow

and orange and mauve. (It becomes necessary to traverse the fields as roads are non-existent.) The sun blazed hot ; the bronzed figures steamed with sweat ; the cheerful voices never failed or flagged. I dozed and drowsed, while East and West in my mind wove a web whose pattern I cannot trace. But a pattern there is. And some day historians will be able to find it.'

What is that pattern, I wonder. When I was with you I felt in the warmth of your love and understanding how easy it was to blend the East and the West in harmony. Must the pattern Mr. Dickinson could not trace, remain for historians to discern ? Why should it not be a reality in our lives today ?

4

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Jategaon Budruk, Bombay
(1926)

From my Journal.

Once again I am in Poona, and the climate is bracing, as may be expected in October. This morning we visited the village of Jategaon Budruk, situated at a distance of about twenty-five miles from Poona.

Leaving our car on the main road we followed the meandering village tract and passed by fields of rabi jowar sown about a month back Germination appeared to be very unsatisfactory, indicating that the supply of seed could be greatly improved. In some jowar fields there was a sprinkling of safflowar seedlings and we were told that the prevalent practice among the cultivators was to grow rabi jowar with safflowar. Some of the village elders who met us on the way informed us that there are about 400 acres under this jowar-safflowar mixture. The crop of jowar is harvested in February, but that of safflowar in March.

We crossed a nullah, which usually dries up in hot weather, and reached the *chavdi* where the patel, or

the headman of the village, had made arrangements to meet us. A large number of villagers has already assembled in the mud-built village hall, commonly called the *chavdi*. On behalf of the village, the patel said that he had a bundle of village papers from which he was prepared to give us any information that we might require. Being asked to read out a survey number, he proceeded to tell us from his records the position in regard to land assessment and holdings. While on poor land, the land assessment did not exceed six annas, good land bore the maximum of Rs. 1–14 per acre. The value of land varied from Rs. 40 to Rs. 500 per acre, according to its suitability for growing money crops and its proximity to the sources of irrigation. In confirmation, he gave us an account of certain recent transactions, incidentally emphasizing that there was a tendency in recent years for such transfers to increase. The history of an actual sale recently made of twelve acres was interesting. The seller inherited an ancestral property of 50 acres, and at the time of his daughter's wedding he had to part with 12 acres out of the 50 which he possessed. The purchaser, who was a resident of the village, had a brother working in the docks of Bombay, and out of his savings it was possible to make this purchase and extend the area of their own holdings. It was interesting to note that the brother working in Bombay had neither severed his connexion with the village, nor had he given up agricultural practice.

Being near Poona, Bombay had attracted others also from the village, and the good wages earned by them had undoubtedly influenced the economy of the village. I was not, however, able to find out the extent of temporary emigration from the village to cities like Bombay and Poona in normal years; but from the instances which were given by the patel, it was clear that actual financial advantage might be derived from drawing a portion of the village population

to industrial and commercial centres, provided the emigrants maintained their interest in their villages. The total number of holdings in the village at the time was 148 as against 23 in the year 1796. As regards the size of the holdings, it tended to run from about 1 to 5 acres.

Most of the people congregated in the village hall were Marathas, whose ancestors, we were told, lived there for centuries. Apart from the Maratha residents of the village, there were a number of families who were intimately associated with the entire communal life. *Gurav* (priests), *Ramoshies* (watchmen), *Chamars* (shoemakers), *Navis* (barbers), and *Lohars* (blacksmiths), all occupied their respective places in the organization of village life.

To return to our conversation with the assembly of villagers, we were told that the water supply, whether for drinking or for irrigation, was a question of great importance to them. They lost no time in informing us that there were only thirty-six wells in the village, out of which sixteen might be described as serviceable, pukka wells. In the hot weather, only one well had the record of supplying potable water for six hours. The fact that not more than 50 acres of land were irrigated from these wells showed clearly the necessity for exploring all possible sources of irrigation in such precarious tracts; but the geological structure and unreliability of underground sources of water rendered the operation of well-sinking a doubtful speculation, and also very expensive

The nullah passed through the heart of the village as the main drainage channel. The nullah water is utilized whenever possible for irrigation by constructing a temporary dam across the stream after the rains. As regards the irrigation channel, which the villagers call *Pat*, we were told that it was being silted up. The gentleman whose official designation was *Talati* was quite emphatic in his pronouncement that the future

of the village depended on the re-opening of the *Pat*. This *Pat* was simply an irrigation channel which carried water accumulated by building a temporary dam across the small river. This method of irrigation had been in existence for many years before the British rule, and such a channel had been held as communal property. But now it was nobody's job to keep such *Pats* open, and there was not much co-operation between the villagers to undertake the work of maintaining these minor irrigation channels.

On the question of the debts of the village, the chief source of finance was a Marwari who had secured for himself a prominent place in the village, both as a money-lender and as a shopkeeper. He was present at the meeting, and on being asked by one of our colleagues as to who the village sowcar was, he promptly stood up. His father settled down in this village with a small capital of Rs. 500 and a small shop. Within a short time, this enterprising Marwari was found to be indispensable to the villagers, and he left his son a moderate fortune. The position of this Marwari resident of this Maratha village was like that of the Gombeen man in the rural areas of Ireland. The truth was that the village money-lender was very accommodating, and he was able to win the confidence of the villagers by showing them his sympathy in time of trouble.

There were two systems of mortgage bonds, one called *Tab Gahan* and the other *Najar Gahan*. In the former, the land was handed over to the creditor, but could be redeemed on payment of the accumulated debt. The mortgagee would get the produce, which was set off against the interest. Under this bond one cultivator reported that he had mortgaged one acre and ten *gunthas* of land for Rs. 99–15 ; that is to say, the mortgage value was nearly two hundred times that of the land revenue assessment, which, for one acre and ten *gunthas* was 9 annas. We were told that the

Najar Gahan system, which was an ordinary form of mortgage, was favoured by most of the villagers. Under this system, land was held and cultivated by the debtor on his own account, but loans bore a heavy rate of interest. About ten years ago Dr. Mann estimated the total debts of 147 families at Rs. 29,384 or Rs. 200 per family. The annual payment of interest was estimated at Rs. 6,750. The villagers could not tell us whether their total indebtedness was increasing or decreasing; but they said, and with a certain amount of pride, that the entire *taccavi* loan of Rs. 6,000 obtained from the Government during the famine of 1918-9 was entirely repaid in time. The rate of interest for other borrowings varied from 12 per cent to 75 per cent; but the usual rate was considered to be 36 per cent. It was a common practice in this, and in the neighbouring villages, to give a bond for twice the amount borrowed from the money-lender. Unfortunately, the Co-operative Credit Movement had not reached the village as yet. Perhaps it would never reach this tract until some local leaders took the initiative; in the meantime, the Marwari would not only hold a dominant position in the village, but would continue to be regarded by many of the debtors as the real friend of the village. The dependence of the villagers on the money-lender was undoubtedly one of the characteristic phenomena of the economic life in such a precarious tract.

We enquired whether there was any scope for subsidiary industries in the village, for no substantial increase in the agricultural production could be expected from the area, while good seasons might occur only two or three times in a decade. In such precarious tracts the development of subsidiary occupations was a problem of vital importance. What might be the possible occupations sufficiently remunerative as to recommend themselves to the economic sense of the villagers none could say with confidence. The replies

we received from the villagers themselves were not very encouraging. Goat-keeping was stated to be profitable but even these animals were not free from the effect of bad seasons. Country blanket weaving was confined to a caste called *Danga*. There was no cotton weaving, but the cultivators had no objection to taking it up. ' We do not grow cotton ', they said, ' and we have not seen how cloth is made. If we were taught, we should be glad to take it up in our spare time after attending to our fields.' Why cotton spinning and weaving were not introduced into this village, I could not say. The villagers who gathered around us emphasized with all eagerness that they wished to undertake any enterprise which would give some relief to their economic distress. The fact that these villagers had introduced improved iron ploughs in the hope of securing better tilth showed that they were not so conservative as one might imagine them to be. My impression was that they were doing all they could to effect improvements in agricultural practices ; but agriculture alone could never, in the face of the precariousness of the tract, give them even a bare subsistence. It was in such regions that suitable rural industries could afford some relief ; but as in the case of the Co-operative Movement, the initiative for introducing such industries in the village must come from the local leaders. The true solution, of course, is to be sought in the direction of relieving the growing pressure of population on the soil.

5

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Palal, Madras
(1926)

From my Journal.

The village of Palal is situated in the Chingelput district. The population is mostly Hindu, belonging to

a number of different castes. It is difficult to record the impression one gets by a visit to a village of this type ; the first thing that strikes a stranger is the utter neglect of the village sanitation. The first problem which a rural reformer will have to tackle is the cleanliness of the village environment.

Our conversation turned to the question of agricultural practices. The villagers complained that the average size of a holding was gradually being reduced to small fragments, and that in many instances cultivation was not profitable. The total population of the village did not exceed 3,000, and the extent of cultivated area according to Settlement was about 4,000 acres, and the total assessment from the village was about Rs. 3,800 (£285).

The villagers seemed to appreciate the use of manures which some of them obtained from the Madras City refuse. The chief crop was paddy, and the bulk of the produce was sold either at Chingelpet or Madras. But they were not satisfied with the present system of selling the farm produce and they felt the need of a Sale Society. In answer to our enquiry whether the villagers received any assistance from the Department of Agriculture, they reported that, so far, no representative of the Department had visited the village, but that they obtained information regarding the planting of paddy from a published calendar of the Department ! The calendar was brought to the village by one of the headmen, and some of the enterprising villagers followed the directions given therein of the economical method of planting paddy.

As regards the condition of cattle, the chief complaint was the scarcity of fodder, paddy straw being the only food they were able to provide for cattle. The cost of working bullocks had gone up about 50 per cent. They required four pairs of bullocks to cultivate 20 acres of land, and as they depended on bullock-power for cultivation they attached greater importance to

bullocks than to cows. There was no grazing ground belonging to the village.

To finance agriculture, most of the villagers had to borrow from the sowcars at the rate of 12 to 36 per cent. A Co-operative Credit Society has recently been formed with only ten members. The other villagers were watching the progress of this Society and had expressed a desire to join it provided they found it advantageous. But they liked their friends-in-need, namely, the village sowcars, who did not press for regular payments. The produce of those who were indebted was sold to the creditors and in most cases the villagers had to buy rice in the bazaars.

It was not possible for the villagers to give us an idea of the extent of their indebtedness ; but they were not much concerned with this question of indebtedness. Their attitude was that it was an inevitable state of affairs and as long as they were able to make repayments when they were blessed with a good season and good crops, they would not mind.

One interesting point which emerged from our conversation was the introduction of a bus service to and from the city of Madras The villagers appreciated this means of communication very much, and its effect on the economy of the village was already conspicuous. Many of the villagers who had no spare time occupation in the village went to the city for work and earned 6 to 8 annas (6¼d. to 9d.) per day. Some of them had become skilled workmen in workshops and earned as much as Rs. 40 to Rs. 90 per month (£3 to £6 15s).

The villagers, though illiterate, showed a high degree of intelligence, and they were quite alive to the possibilities of improving their environment. There was a temple in the village maintained by *Inam* lands, but there was no school. ' Why was the temple not used for the purpose of a school ? ' I asked the headman. He replied that the priest did not agree to such a proposal. There, you see, that the tradition of

corporate life is fast breaking down, and there is nothing to take its place. The villagers had much spare time on their hands. Why, then, could they not be induced to offer their services for the improvement of the village surroundings? Why, within such a short distance of Madras, should a village be without a school? The static condition of the village cannot be made dynamic unless and until the educated youth of the country can grasp the situation intelligently and pursue the remedies persistently. What those remedies may be will have to be discovered by the workers themselves by a thorough study of the life and labour of the villages which they desire to serve. Our immediate field of activity must be in the direction of waging war against ignorance. The remark of a Swiss gentleman to the British Commissioners deputed to enquire into technical education of Switzerland is applicable to our condition: 'We know that the mass of our people must be poor; but we are determined that they shall not also be ignorant.'

On my return to Madras, I spoke to an official about the complaint of the villagers of not meeting any representative of the Department of Agriculture. He replied that the Department was under-staffed, and was overwhelmed with administrative duties!

6

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Burnihat, Assam
(1926)

To a friend in India.

Today is market day, and there is a fair gathering of villagers at the site where the weekly market is held. On our return journey from Shillong we halted near the village of Burnihat to get a glimpse of the economic life of the Assam peasantry from the assembled crowd.

The first thing that struck me was the condition of the livestock. Assam cattle are very small in size and their quality as producers of milk is very poor, but the Assam buffalo is really a splendid animal. I learned that this animal would give about three *seers* of milk per day, but this splendid breed of buffalo was being gradually deteriorated by the contamination of a breed known as *Banger*, which the professional grazers introduced in the Assam valley. These professional grazers have no knowledge of breeding, but they supply milk products to the towns and also sell a large number of draught animals before the ploughing season. Even the educated classes do not understand the benefits of selective breeding and of the food requirements of cattle. The 'skin and bone' condition of these animals is, indeed, a pathetic sight to see.

We saw a number of Marwari traders in this market; they buy paddy seed, potatoes, and mustard from petty local dealers. Most of the rice-mills are under the control of the Marwaris.

You may be interested in the various commodities which are brought in by the villagers in this market. The popularity of spinning and weaving is evident from the amount of home-spun yarn and *khaddar* seen here. Over 500,000 handlooms are working in the province—a good omen.

It is interesting to note that in Assam there is no caste restriction against this important subsidiary occupation. Women and girls of all castes and classes take delight in spinning and weaving. There are a number of villagers who have beads and other articles made of lac. The women of the hill tribes are very fond of bead necklaces, but on closer inspection I found that most of these beads were made of glass and that they are imported articles. Lac-rearing appears to be another occupation of the villagers. It is usually reared on trees of the ficus variety and our Marwari friends export a quantity of crude lac to Calcutta.

The health of the villagers is naturally what one may expect in a country notorious for malaria, kala-azar, and other forms of epidemic disease. One also suspects that a considerable number of these village folk who assemble in the market are addicted to opium.

7

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Naosalia, Assam
(1926)

From my Journal.

Naosalia is a hamlet within the village group known as Kaari Pukhuri. It is about fifteen miles from Jorhat. The hamlet is about a quarter of a mile from the main unmetalled road and is completely nestled within bamboo groves. Following the narrow path that leads through the groves, we stopped near a hut. Here we met a robust but lazy-looking man happily basking in the sun with a baby in his arms. His wife had gone to work in the fields and he was nursing this child! 'Why don't you take good care of your cattle?' I asked a group of villagers. What they said amounted to this: there can be no incentive to take particular care of cattle if their quality is not sufficiently improved. The imported cart-bullocks are well looked after because they are serviceable. Then the average price of a pair of good bullocks would be about Rs. 250 (£18 15s.), an amount which is beyond the capacity of an ordinary cultivator to raise. Then, epidemic diseases of cattle and shortage of fodder were most serious. From the middle of September their cattle cannot get sufficient fodder. The working bullocks on whose efficiency cultivation entirely depends, are usually fed with chopped banana at the time of fodder scarcity. But the milch cows have to live in a semi-starved condition, getting what nutrition they can from grazing on the fields after the rice harvest.

'If you ask a cultivator', writes an Indian official of the Agricultural Department, 'why he has two pairs of cattle while one pair of good bullocks could do the work, he would say that he cannot afford to buy a costly pair of cattle at a time; besides, his two pairs would die two times!'

Rice is the chief crop grown by the villagers, but the yield is only about ten maunds of paddy per *poorah* of land. Usually they have no surplus to sell and for obtaining other necessities of life the villagers have to depend on wages for such labours as may be required in Jorhat and its neighbourhood. Those who possess flourishing bamboo groves make a handsome income by selling bamboos for which there is a good demand.

Villager	Average holdings Paddy Land	Pairs of bullocks owned	Number of dependants
1	6 or 7 poorahs	2 pairs	5
2	1½ poorahs	1 pair	2
3	2½ ,,	1 ,,	4
4	7 bighas	1 ,,	4
5	6 ,,	1 ,,	4
6	16 ,,	1 ,,	5
7	6 ,,	None	–
8	2 poorahs	1 pair	4

Obviously the majority of the villagers cannot make a living from their land. I ask you, 'Is there any hope of improving the agriculture when some of the holdings consist of small fragments as shown in the above table?' The Assamese cultivator is a leisure-loving person, and the standard of cultivation is very low. A great deal can be done to improve cultivation; but unfortunately the activities of the Department of Agriculture have not reached this village as yet. The introduction of sugar-cane might help, but no systematic attempt has been made to introduce this crop in this

tract. Cultivators do not grow it because of damage done by jackals and monkeys !

The situation has naturally arisen where indebtedness is likely to become chronic. Two cultivators of the village are doing money-lending business, but a co-operative society has lately been started with the village school-teacher as secretary. The total membership is about one hundred, but the deposits from the members are unsatisfactory and therefore the society is financed by the Central Bank. The selling of bamboo and fuel appears to be a profitable source of income by which the members of the co-operative society hope to repay their debts. The money-lender's rate of interest is over 36 per cent and that of the society over 15 per cent per annum.

As regards the possibilities of any subsidiary occupations, I was happy to be assured that in every family hand-weaving was popular, and it was in this way that they were able to clothe themselves. They buy the yarns from the market, and consider hand-spinning neither attractive nor profitable. The yarns generally used are obtained from Indian mills.

Cultivating families living in the neighbourhood of tea-gardens often find work there during the intervals of agricultural seasons. In reply to our enquiry why the villagers do not work in the tea-gardens, they said that they did not know the art of pruning the bushes and that the rate of wages was low.

A time-expired labourer from tea-gardens who is now residing in the village was introduced to us. His father came from the Ganjam District in the Madras Presidency some years ago. He was born in a tea-garden and worked there since childhood. His father had died five years ago, when he left the tea-gardens and settled in this village. Now he works in an oil mill owned by a Marwari in Jorhat.

The picture of the whole village was very depressing and the difficulties arising out of uneconomic holdings

seem almost insuperable. The only hope lies in the development of suitable subsidiary occupations through co-operative organizations, but there again the impetus to economic progress must come from the people themselves. They must wake up and face their own problem. I know they are conscious of their misery, but suffer in silence, attributing every condition of their existence to the law of *Karma*.

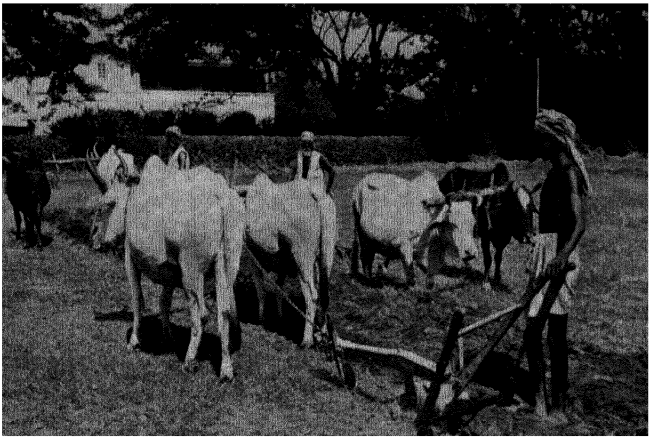
8

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Pitkelghata, Bengal
(1927)

To a Social Service Worker.

One of my colleagues, after returning from a visit to the village of Pitkelghata, said to me : ' Now I realize what is wrong with Bengal—malnutrition and malaria.' And I added the money-lender. The diagnosis was undoubtedly correct ; but what must be the remedy ?

The village is situated about twenty-one miles from Calcutta on the Diamond Harbour Road. We could not ascertain who were the superior landlords of the village ; nor did we meet the village headman. Therefore, whatever information we were able to gather was from the cultivators themselves. We began our conversation with the cultivators on questions regarding their indebtedness. That they were heavily indebted was clear from the replies we received. One cultivator gave certain figures as regards his economic position. He carried a debt of Rs. 200, for which his *Mahajan* charged at the rate of 4 annas in the rupee ; i.e. he paid Rs. 50 per year as interest on the principal of Rs. 200. He owned five *bighas* of land, and the principal crop he reaped from his land was rice. Altogether he got about Rs. 70 to Rs. 80 worth of paddy per year ; he paid in rent about Rs. 10. From this estimate it



THE PUNJAB PLOUGH IN USE AT DACCA FARM

A TYPICAL VILLAGE SCENE, BENGAL

was difficult to get an idea of the cost of cultivation or the cultivator's net income.

This five-*bigha* man had a family of nine members to maintain, and he required at least five seers of rice per day on the basis of about half-a-pound each meal. Most of the cultivators said that about seven months in the year they had to buy rice for their own consumption, for during the harvest they would have to sell a portion of their own crop in order to pay rent to the Zemindar, and a portion by way of interest to the *Mahajan.*

There was no subsidiary occupation in the village. They had to depend on such labour as might be required either in the city or at Diamond Harbour. Although, owing to the proximity of the city, poultry-keeping might be a profitable business, they said they did not like these profitable birds because they would make the place filthy. The villagers made no efforts to introduce handlooms or spinning, which, they agreed, might be a suitable spare time occupation for those who were unable to get employment during the slack season elsewhere. The outstanding fact of the whole village was the heavy indebtedness usually incurred, not for productive purposes, but in order to meet their ordinary requirements. This unproductive debt had naturally placed the villagers not only in the grip of the *Mahajan,* but had also left them in the midst of a vicious circle out of which it was difficult to extricate them. The burden of debt has an insidious influence on the outlook of life—it paralyses all springs of action, it produces that inertia from which it is difficult to rescue an illiterate population. Then, looking at the physique of the villagers, the unmistakable signs of degeneration were noticeable. And this state of affairs in a village in Bengal, which still retained the reputation of being one of the granaries of India ! The Moghuls called Bengal the Paradise of Countries. It is to be remembered that this village was almost completely under the control

of the *Mahajan*, he being the main source of credit for the villagers. At harvest the produce had to be sold, in many cases through the *Mahajan*. Thus the actual profits of agriculture found their way into the iron chest of the money-lender. From his close observation of the economic conditions of the Indian agriculturist, Sir Daniel Hamilton comes to the conclusion : ' What India requires is an Act written, not with a goose quill dipped in milk and water, but with an iron pen dipped in the blood of the *Mahajan*.'

Under the existing judicial system, the *Mahajan* wields a great power over his debtor. One villager said to me that the rent due to their landlord was usually demanded at the harvesting season, and consequently the cultivator had to sell his crop far below the market price The rent-collector and the Marwari seemed to work in co-operation for their mutual benefit !

But the mere control of the *mahajani* system will not solve the problem of rescuing the peasantry from the grip of indebtedness. In the absence of adequate facilities for investment, the money-lender has to seek recourse to unfair means in tempting ' the people who live within his ken '. ' There is ample authority ', writes our colleague, Mr. Calvert, ' for the conclusion that a determining factor in increasing indebtedness is the necessity felt by the money-lender of finding an outlet for his accumulated wealth '

Want of prudence and foresight is one of the causes of the increase in rural indebtedness. The Bengal cultivator has no sense of thrift ; to make provision for the future is something almost foreign to him except only with regard to certain agricultural operations. He carefully saves seeds for the next sowing, or preserves farmyard manure if he can ; but he cannot save money.

This habit—lack of thrift—must have risen from lack of security. During the rule of the Moghuls, the

exactions of the *Subedars*, the landlords, and the tax-collectors, were severe, and the circumstances under which the cultivator had to eke out an existence could not have fostered habits of foresight and prudence in him. Today, this problem can be solved by the spread of co-operation and by improving the economic status of the cultivator.

Some of the villagers believed that there was scope for the introduction of spinning and weaving in the village ; but there was no one to take the necessary initiative. Here, as it was in the case of other villages in India, the programme of rural uplift had to be initiated by those who realized that until and unless the rural life received a fresh impetus to ' better business, better farming, and better living ', India would never be able to harness the organized forces of the twentieth century for the re-making of this vast sub-continent.

You find the solution of all these problems in the conquest of power from the British hands, but I am concerned with the grave risk attending upon the weakening of rural life. I want strength in the fundamental structure of the nation. A plan for rural reconstruction must include :

(*a*) Technical improvements in agriculture ;
(*b*) Spread of Co-operative ideals ;
(*c*) Adult Education ;
(*d*) Re-organization of Village Community Administration ;
(*e*) Re-establishment of Cottage Industries ; and
(*f*) Revision of the Land Tenure system.

Our landlords must wake up before it is too late to arrest the growth of agrarian unrest. They should be prepared to deal with the land question in a generous spirit if they desire to retain their position as ' natural leaders '. They have not, so far, justified the privileges given to them by the State.

The Indian Peasant

9

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture Camp (India) (1927)

To a friend in Great Britain.

We are now in the Punjab—perhaps the most prosperous province in India. The magic of irrigation has transformed within a quarter of a century about one-third of the province into a fertile agricultural tract, and there has been a conspicuous rise in the standard of living. It is known as a land of peasant proprietors.[1]

I like the look of the Punjab peasant. His sturdy physique and serene simplicity distinguish him from his fellow-cultivator in Bengal. In the Central Punjab, the Jat is the predominant type among the peasants. The agricultural officers speak very highly of the character of the Jat. A settlement officer writes: 'From the time he is old enough to wear a piece of string round his middle and drive the cattle to the field, until he is too old to do more than sit in the sunshine and weave a hemp rope, his life is one of unceasing toil, borne patiently and without complaint.' Indeed he is industrious, enterprising and thoroughly conversant in the art of farming. One of the English officials[2] who has had wide experience in the province, writes that the Jats 'have some of the canny business flair of the lowland Scot'. So you can imagine what it is like!

As an example of the simplicity of the Jat peasants, I have collected from a Punjabi gentleman a little prayer which may amuse you. But I should tell you that this prayer does not form the part of any religious

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[1] Landlordism has also become a growing feature of rural economy. It is estimated that about 60 per cent of the land is cultivated by tenants on the *batai* system (see p. 26).

[2] M. L. Darling, I.C.S.

worship! The Jats do not have any distinctive religion or code of ethics. In Central Punjab they are mainly Sikhs, but in other parts of the province you have Hindu and Moslem Jats.

Dhanna the Jat peasant prays to God as follows:

'O God, I, thine afflicted servant, come to thee. Thou arrangest the affairs of those who perform Thy service. I beg of Thee to give me flour, ghee and pulse, so that my heart may rejoice for ever. I want shoes and fine clothes, and wheat grown on my land ploughed seven times over. I want a milch cow and a buffalo, and a good Turkustani mare, and a good wife. These things Thy servant Dhanna begs of Thee.'

But Dhanna's income is not sufficient for him to get all these things. From the information available to the Commission, it appears that the peasant's income even in the prosperous Punjab is meagre. It is difficult to make a reliable estimate of *net* income per acre as the peasant is unable to provide data in regard to the cost of cultivation, etc. The Department of Agriculture has not as yet made an attempt to investigate farm accounts[1] of certain typical holdings in the Province.

10

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Lutakram, Punjab
(1927)

From my Journal.

On our journey from Sukkur to Peshawar we halted at Muzaffargarh station and paid a visit to the village

[1] An interesting study of *Farm Accounts in the Punjab*, 1930-1, by Sardar Kartar Singh of the Agricultural College, Lyallpur, gives details for selected holdings in nine districts of the Province. The average net income per acre of the cultivators in canal colonies is as follows:

1928-9	.. .. ..	Rs. 32-8-4
1929-30	.. .. ..	Rs. 20-1-3
1930-1	.. .. ..	Rs. 7-14-7.

[One Rupee = 1s. 6d.]

Lutakram. Before I describe certain features of this district which stand out in sharp contrast to what we had seen in other parts of the Punjab, let me record my impression of this typical village. The chief tribes are Pathans and Kirars. There are a number of Jats as well. Of these tribes the Jats are the best cultivators; but the Kirars are considered to be the most progressive and enterprising. As there are no other means of livelihood, most of them depend on agriculture. But, out of 1,500 acres within the survey boundary only about 560 acres are cultivated.

The first thing the villagers told us was the scarcity of the water supply. There were about fifty wells within the village and the cultivated area, but the water level was steadily going down. They also reported that alkali was making its appearance and becoming a serious problem. In spite of these difficulties, the cultivators did their utmost to secure good crops ; they ploughed their lands four or five times ; but they complained of insufficiency of bullock power. A cultivator owning ten *bighas* (about 3 acres) of land, which was the average holding of the village, would require one pair of bullocks, and he would grow wheat in five *bighas* and fodder in the rest. The average yield of wheat per acre was about five to six maunds. The biggest landlord of the village possessed about 600 *bighas* of land which he distributed among his tenants. The system of rent was known as *batai*, i.e. one-third share of the produce with $2\frac{1}{2}$ seers per maund *kharcha* (expenses). *Abiana* was paid by tenants. 'But I get one quarter,' exclaimed a villager, 'and the rest goes in kind to blacksmiths, carpenters, and so on.'

Many villagers depend for their bare existence on income from date trees. The Government revenue on date trees from this village was about Rs. 550 (£41 5s.) per year, while the total land revenue assessment was about Rs. 1,300 (£97 15s.).

In a village whose population was slightly over a thousand there were fifteen sowcars. Their position in the village was not different from what was prevalent in other precarious tracts of India. The money-lender was the cultivator's financier, dealer, shopkeeper, supplier of cattle and everything. The money-lenders usually keep two accounts, one for cash transactions and the other for dealings in kind. The people did not as yet understand the basis of cash payment.

The question then arose about mortgages.[1] The villagers said that the land was not passing from the small cultivators into the hands of large cultivators through mortgage. The reason was that the Hindus could not buy land; but they could take on usufructuary mortgage for twenty years. As regards the large Mohammedan landowners, they were mostly in debt and therefore could not buy land. The data about mortgage transactions during the last five years were supplied to us.

MORTGAGES WITHIN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

Year	Area in acres	Cultivated	Assessment	Mortgage money
			Rs.	Rs.
1921-2	3	2	25	175
1922-3	2	2	3	790
1924-5	2	2	2	665
1925-6	29	17	37	3,302
Total	36	23	67 (£5)	4,932 (£370)

Thus from the table is shown that the average mortgage money comes to Rs. 137 (£10) per acre. The village has no Co-operative Credit Society.

[1] The statistics of land transfers and mortgages in the Punjab show that debt is more widespread in this province than elsewhere. The object of the Punjab Land Alienation Act is, to a great extent, frustrated by the rise of a new class of money-lenders belonging to agricultural tribes.

The general appearance of the village was indeed depressing. The dwellings of the Jats and of some of the Kirars were slightly better than those of the Pathan *Kamins*. We saw some small flocks of sheep and goats, but they were of a very poor quality. There was no school or dispensary in the village.

An hour's visit to this village, typical of the district of Muzaffargarh, gave me an idea as to why it was known as ' the depressed district ' of the Punjab. The country around is practically a desert ; only in some places one could find suitable tracts for grazing. The district lies outside the monsoon area and rainfall throughout the year is small and capricious. In this rainless tract floods are uncertain and supply from inundation canals precarious.

The Indus and the Chenab rivers which run along the western and eastern borders of the district may yet through engineering skill solve the problem of colonizing the vast area of the district. Without controlled irrigation, agricultural prosperity of the district is bound to remain unrealized. The second feature is the heavy indebtedness of the inhabitants. The attempt that has been made by the Co-operative Department to relieve the situation has been neither successful nor popular. For a number of years in the past, the district has received much anxious consideration from the Government and the remedy which Mr. Calvert suggested was applicable not only to this district but to many such precarious tracts throughout India. Mr. Calvert's remedy is ' shaking off of prior debts '. Without some relief for the excessive indebtedness of the cultivators, no beginning can be made to improve the economic and social conditions of the people, situated as they are in such circumstances in which the standard of cultivation cannot possibly be high. But the trouble is they cannot shake off the excessive load of debts, unless this standard is somewhat raised. Therefore, perhaps, the first step that

should be taken is to provide facilities for irrigation. Another characteristic of the district is that the landed gentry are not, as a rule, sympathetic towards the small cultivators. There is a large number of big landlords in the district ; but they carry on cultivation through labourers or temporary tenants. The labourers are paid monthly wages in kind, and in addition the sum of Re. 1 (1s. 6d.) for out-of-pocket expenses !

II

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Chung, Punjab
(1927)

From my Journal.

The village is about twelve miles from the city of Lahore. The general appearance of the village and the cattle owned by the villagers were better than what we saw in other provinces. The secret of the health of their cattle lies in the superiority of the breed, and in the fact that the villagers really do take great care of their cattle. They feed them well ; cows usually receive two seers, and bullocks three seers of grain per day, and they receive as much fodder as may be available. Besides, the cultivators take a special care of the bullocks.

The ordinary cultivator of the village possessed not more than 6 or 7 acres of land, while the chief man in the village owned 84 acres. The total area assessed in the village was about 4,600 acres. The prosperity of the village was undoubtedly due to the cultivation of cotton which brought in a handsome profit in good years. As an example of the improvement in the cultivators' standard of living, we were told that the families who used to eat *bajri* could now afford wheat and rice. Perhaps another factor that might have contributed to their improved standard of living was to

be found in the employment of women-folk in hand-spinning and weaving. We saw a number of spinning wheels inside the courtyards of homesteads. The village children looked healthy ; it was probably due to the fact that the milk produced in the village was consumed by the families. I asked one of the retired army men if the system of farming in the neighbourhood had in any way improved during the last ten years. He did not notice any substantial improvement, but mentioned that the area under cotton had increased in recent years.

Cultivation depended largely on irrigation facilities. The water rate per acre was assessed on the types of crop grown in it and was Rs. 4–6 (6s. 7d.) for wheat, Rs. 4–9 (6s. 10d.) for cotton, in addition to the rent which for *barani* land was Rs. 1–4 (1s. 10d.) and for well-irrigated land Rs. 1–12 (2s. 7d.). The total assessment of the village was about Rs. 3,000 (£225). The nearest Government Agricultural farm was about twelve miles from the village, and cultivators had not, as yet, received much help from the Department of Agriculture. The *Zaildar* hastened to inform us that some of the cultivators occasionally visited the Government farm and obtained good seed ; but the village on the whole depended on seed obtained from the sowcar or the village *Bania*. The cultivators complained that they were not satisfied with the quality of the seed they received from the sowcar. The same story was heard again—the sowcar had a tremendous grip on the village. There was no co-operative society in the village, and in reply to our questions the villagers said that they were not keen on co-operative societies, for they obtained money whenever they wanted it from the sowcar, although the minimum rate of interest charged by him was 36 per cent.

As regards the position of their holdings the process of sub-division and fragmentation was going on apace, and there had been no attempt hitherto to consolidate

holdings. The village produce was sold to the village *Bania*, and in some cases in the Lahore market; but if they are indebted to the *Bania*, the villagers are obliged to sell the grain to him.

Pointing out a manure pit near a homestead we asked whether cow-dung was used for manuring the land. The reply was that whatever they could save after meeting their requirements as fuel, they did use in the fields; but a villager said that for cooking purposes, cow-dung cakes were more satisfactory than any other form of fuel. Another villager confirmed the statement, and remarked: 'We do not think that milk is the same if it is not boiled on a fire of cow-dung cakes.'

The villagers complained of the prevalence of cattle-disease in the locality, and of not having received any assistance from the State. As cultivation has to depend on good bullocks (the average price of which ranges from Rs. 120 (£9) to Rs. 200 (£15)) they desired the Government to pay special attention to the protection of cattle against epidemics.

There was one primary school in the village, maintained partly by the local bodies, and partly by the subscription from the villagers themselves.

12

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture, Village Karimpur (Gurgaon District) (1927)

From my Journal.

The village Karimpur is one of the model villages of the large estate belonging to Major Skinner. The work is somewhat on the lines pursued by Mr. Brayne[1] in the village under his jurisdiction.

[1] See No. 69, pp. 154 ff.

Mr. Ingram, the chargé d'affaires of the estate, escorted us to the place where he had succeeded in inducing the villagers to dig manure pits. Each of these pits measures 15 by 10 by 6, and we were told that more than 900 such pits had already been dug. Among the tenants, as a result of the campaign for preservation of cow dung, the practice of '*upla* (cow-dung cake) making' had been considerably reduced. But it was essential to make certain provisions for the supply of fuel other than 'upla'. Therefore, the Estate had taken care to grow trees and shrubs for supplying the villagers with fuel. As regards improved agricultural operations, sugar-cane (Coimbatore 205[1]) had done well, and the tenants prefer this variety to any of the local varieties. It is hard and not liable to be damaged easily by wild pigs; it is a good *gur*-producing cane and requires the minimum quantity of water. But these canes ripen rather late, while the farmers would like to have an earlier ripening variety. Pusa wheat No. 12 can only be grown where water supply is abundant. Therefore, the estate has achieved greater success with Punjab 8A. The soil conditions are poor and a considerable portion of the Estate suffered from saline efflorescence. The usual measure for reclamation consists of deep ploughing, green manuring and constant watering.

Most of the tenants of the village are Jats and they are all tenants-at-will, and therefore liable to eviction any time the manager wishes; but a Jat is a good cultivator and does his best even when he works under disadvantages.

The main fact that is to be noted here is that the landlords can render useful service to agricultural progress if they only make up their minds to use their influence with the tenants. The State departments of agriculture should disseminate the necessary knowledge

[1] An improved variety of cane.

relating to agriculture and livestock management among the landlords and they, in their turn, should keep the departments informed about the difficulties experienced in the way of introducing better methods of farming. Success in ' practising agriculture with science ' should be made known to every landlord of the district, giving him a short account of the progress.

If landlords do their share in the betterment of their tenants, India will make rapid progress in agriculture. I remember Tagore's proposal for employing in big estates young men trained in agriculture whose duties would be something like those discharged by county agents in the United States. Here lies a vast field of active social service for our young men. For their training our agricultural colleges should provide a short course and a special curriculum. In the United States, there is, I believe, a *law* which provides federal funds for the teaching of agriculture to the farm boys and girls in the secondary schools, and, in the South, evening classes are held for adult farmers. All this for the purpose of making the results of scientific agricultural research known to them. Will our future legislators remember the need of formulating a scheme for agricultural education so as to make it an integral part of rural education ?

13

Atgam (South Gujarat)
(1930)

From my Journal.

The Report of the Agricultural Commission recommended that our Universities should encourage the study of the social and economic problems of the countryside—not merely for producing academic

dissertations, but with the object of supplying the need of leadership and service in the interests of rural communities.

It is gratifying to find that the University of Bombay has undertaken a series of investigations into the life of the people living in rural areas. The result of one of such studies is now available to us.[1]

The village Atgam is situated about nine miles from Bulsar in the Surat district. It is a *Kaliparaj* village ; that is, the majority of the inhabitants belong to black races, such as Dhodia, Naika, Dubla, Bhil and others. The rest of the Hindus come under the classification *Ujaliparaj*, which includes Brahmins, Banias, Kajputs, Kolis, etc. Out of 461 families, 294 belong to the *Kaliparaj* and 167 to the *Ujaliparaj* group. ' There is a wide gulf ', the writer says, ' between the two in respect of their standard of living, customs and social traditions, as well as in their methods of agricultural work.' What a heterogeneous population within a single village community ! and this is indeed a common feature of villages in South Gujarat.

Rice and sugar-cane are the two principal crops grown here, but in an area where the rainfall does not average more than 30 inches, the crops are largely dependent on adequate and *timely* supply of water. The soil is poor—deficient in nitrogen, and available phosphoric acid and potash. Thus, agricultural prospects are precarious ; and unless irrigation facilities are provided for, the hope of developing farming in this tract is remote.

As yet only 2 per cent of the 461 families (that is, nine families) are not dependent on agriculture for their existence and there are fifty families whose income is derived indirectly from agriculture. The remaining 402 families live on an average holding of 7·3 acres.

[1] *Life and Labour in a South Gujarat Village*, by G. C. Mukhtyar.

About a quarter of a century ago the average size of a holding was over 14 acres. Then set in the usual fragmentation of holdings. In this village, on the average there are six fragments for each holding. The distribution of the village holdings is as follows :

Less than 1 acre	143
1 to 5 acres	133
6 to 10 acres	67
11 to 15 acres	28
15 to 20 acres	19
21 to 30 acres	18
over 30 acres	18

Keatinge, who was a Director of Agriculture of the Bombay Presidency, regarded 15-20 acres as an ' economic holding ' in the dry-crop villages of the Surat District. On this basis over 87 per cent of the holdings of village Atgam may be regarded as uneconomic. No wonder the total indebtedness of the village has reached about Rs. 95,000 (£7,125) ; in other words Rs. 43 (£3 4s. 6d.) per capita. And so long as the average family barely maintains itself, the mill-owners of Ahmedabad and the industrialists of other neighbouring towns can always depend on a continual supply of labour.

Speaking about labour The investigator writes that ' Agricultural organization of South Gujarat is based on the *Hali* System '. Which is a form of mortgaged labour. A *Hali* is regarded as a freeman *de jure*, but a serf *de facto*. The author describes the system as follows :

' A poor member of the *Kalıparaj* Community, on coming of age, approaches one of the big landlords of his village, or of some neighbouring village, for a loan to finance his marriage. In return for the loan, as he has little landed property to offer as security, he gives a verbal promise to serve the creditor till his debt is repaid. This promise is usually renewed every year. In the majority of cases the labourer is never able to

repay the loan all his life ; and has to serve the master for his whole lifetime.'

Among the *Kaliparaj* only 4·8 per cent are literate in the sense that they only know how to sign their names, and *not a single female* can do that. The percentage of literacy among the *Ujalipara* Hindus is, however, high.

All the same the helplessness of the conditions under which the majority live perhaps makes them so eager to avail themselves of any prospect of better living. The Co-operative Society, started in 1917, has therefore become an important factor in the social and economic life of the people. But it is essential that an organization for marketing should be set up, enabling the primary producer to get the advantage of rising prices. Today he is, in most cases, forced to part with the crops at the harvesting season.

Even such measures seem to me to be mere palliatives. The diagnosis of the social and economic conditions obtaining in rural India calls for drastic remedies. Here I believe an attempt to consolidate holdings through Co-operative Societies should at once be made ; and if, say, within five years, no appreciable results are derived from such measures, then the Government should enact necessary legislations for remedying this fatal tendency in rural economy.

It is interesting to note that most of the villagers are ' peasant proprietors ' ; that is, the problem consequent upon the prevalence of rent-receiving absentee landlords or the landless tenants, does not arise here. I am inclined to think that suitable cottage industries, organized in combination with agriculture, may be set up in the village. These would offer occupations to women and also men in their spare time. Perhaps the very heterogeneous character of the population makes such *organized* ventures impracticable. Or is it the siren-call from the mills and factories of the Province that is so alluring ?

14

Ballygunj, Calcutta
(1930)

From my Journal.

Ever since my return from Kotulpur (a village in the district of Bankura) I have been trying to picture in my mind how one could grapple with such depressing economic conditions as exist in the whole district. It is the poorest and most backward district in Bengal, and therefore needs special care from the Government. From what I have heard, seen and read about this district there can be only one conclusion, it is under the grip of death. As regards means of salvation, I am in agreement with the conclusion of F. W. Robertson, Esq., I.C.S., who writes in his Settlement Report that ' with the bulk of the population in this condition, it is hopeless to look for any improvement in agriculture '. The average size of a cultivator's holding is 1·86 acres ; the amount of rice (the main crop of the district) produced from the land owned by each family is insufficient to afford to each member two full meals daily ; the majority of the cultivators, artisans and labourers, is heavily indebted and most of them have been reduced to the position of a serf to the *Mahajan* and the landlord.

The economic conditions of the people are reflected in their environment. The village sites are usually surrounded with jungle and undergrowth and the houses are truly described as wretched hovels. ' Each house possesses its own little evil-smelling *doba* or tank ', observes the ' Survey and Settlement Report of the District of Bankura ' excavated to make the foundations when the house was built, and each household cherishes its own manure heaps within the compound. . . . Most of the villages have to depend on a dirty stagnant tank to provide drinking water, and it is only those who live close to the rivers who are able

to obtain good water for drinking. It is, therefore, perhaps hardly to be wondered at that malaria stalks unchecked through the country.

Ten years ago a district magistrate left a note describing the condition of the people entrusted to his care as follows :

> ' The average cultivator is heavily in debt. He hands over the greater part of his harvest to his *Mahajan* to meet existing obligations and, as he is usually unable to maintain himself with the balance till the next harvest, he has to borrow again a few months later. He pursues his career of borrowing and repaying from year's end to year's end, always adding to his burden and never making any advance towards release. Placed in this hopeless position it is not surprising that the virtue of thrift does not appeal to him. The condition of the artisan is hardly better. . . . The agricultural labourer leads a hand to mouth existence.'[1]

This gloomy state of affairs was described to me by the village elders as well as by two members of the District Board whom I met during my visit. They believe that the situation can be improved by increased facilities for irrigation and by rigorous control of the money-lending business. But the village elders thought that the systems of land tenures required drastic alterations in the interest of the cultivator. The same old story of fundamental handicaps of our peasantry.

Yesterday I went to see the Registrar of the Co-operative Societies. He was repeating the usual complaints—illiteracy and thriftlessness—of the people of the district. He does not seem to realize that under the conditions of their existence, no one would care to be literate and thrifty. No, the problem of the District demands a strong determined executive with a definite and comprehensive plan for solving its social and economic problems. The time for palliatives is over.

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[1] Quoted by F. W. Robertson, Esq., I.C.S., in his Settlement Report.

THE LATE SIR GANGA RAM, C.I.E., M.V.O.
(Member, Linlithgow Agricultural Commission)

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Chapter II

ECONOMIC LIFE OF RURAL INDIA

15

Shelida
(1911)

To a Professor, University of Illinois, U.S.A.

After three years' close touch with a few villages of Bengal, I am able to form an idea of our agricultural problem. The Bengal cultivator is not a fool and does his best under the conditions in which he has to carry on farming. A distinguished English investigator truly remarked :

' At his best the Indian ryot (cultivator) is quite as good as, and in some respects the superior of, the average British farmer ; whilst at his worst, it can only be said that this state is brought about largely by an absence of facilities for improvement which is probably unequalled in any other country, and that the ryot will struggle patiently and uncomplainingly in the face of difficulties in a way that no one else would.'[1]

But the main problem, as I see it now, is to provide the poor cultivators—they are the majority of the agricultural population—with such facilities as would be required for improving his business of farming.

The yield of crops is poor due to lack of manure and manuring. One of Tagore's old officers told me that the land had become greatly impoverished and that we needed better manure, better seed and better plough-cattle for improving agriculture in Bengal. He is no scientist, but is richly endowed with common sense.

The village head-men with whom I held occasional discourse informed me that the rent was high and that

[1] Dr J. Voelcker, consulting Chemist to the Royal Agricultural Society of England, was invited by the Government of India in 1889 to report on the improvement of Indian Agriculture. The Report was published in 1893.

about 90 per cent of the tenant farmers were in the hands of the money-lenders. Some of these head-men are extremely shrewd and possess a real insight into their problems: of the various solutions they suggest, these deserve a careful scrutiny.

(1) The 'rent' paid to the landlord should be levied according to the difference of soil and cost of cultivation. The land improved by the cultivating tenants should not be subject to enhancement.

(2) The landlord should advance money at a reasonable rate of interest for agricultural operations.

(3) The landlord should assist tenants to sell their produce at a proper price.

(4) The amount of 'road cess'[1] paid by a village should be spent for the betterment of the roads serving that village.

While we are thinking of improving agriculture by laying out an experimental farm here, the village elders think in terms of fixed rent, facile credit, better marketing facilities and so on. I am perplexed. Tagore's idea of an agricultural bank has caught my imagination, and I am trying to grasp the intricacies of a credit system such as could be applied to the existing rural conditions. The estate officers are, however, sceptical about any success in reducing indebtedness of the tenants.

16

Patisar,
Bengal
(1912)

From my Journal.

I came here to inspect the Agricultural Bank established by Tagore for providing facile credit for his

[1] Road cess: at present a tax included in the land revenue and not therefore earmarked for local use.

tenants. The system followed is not different from that of *mahajani* except the fact of low rates of interest on the loans advanced to the tenants; but, I believe, the Bank should be organized on a co-operative basis.

Yesterday evening I explained to Tagore's estate officers some of the principles of Raiffeissen Co-operative Banks. As soon as I mentioned that they were of German origin, the officers signified their disapproval; and one of them prophesied failure of any such scheme in this *pargana*. But I went on.

The first principle, I said, is unlimited liability. That is, the members as a body would assume the responsibility for the payment of the debts of individuals constituting the co-operative society. The object is to create credit for those tenants who are honest and hard-working cultivators but have to borrow from *Mahajans* at a high rate of interest. The fact that the credit of an individual depends on his honesty and capacity for work is not easily understood. I listened to the specious arguments of the officers which centred round the prevalence of ignorance and of dishonesty among the peasantry.

But, I said, if the area of operation of the society is restricted so that its members may be closely acquainted with each other and thus acquire mutual confidence, the foundation of credit may soon be established. Indeed this is the second principle of Raiffeissen Banks.

Then the management of the Bank must be in the hands of its members—who should elect the officials but no remuneration or privilege should be given to them for the services rendered to the Bank.

My explanations were followed by a volley of questions—and I was glad. Having explained the sources from where the Bank would obtain capital, I said that profits earned by the Bank would be devoted to building up reserves and also to such purposes that would benefit the community.

The result of the discussion was not very encouraging, but I insisted that the proposal should be placed before the *Pradhans* who were present there. This was agreed to. The consensus of opinion was not in favour of such a scheme.

The day before I was to leave Patisar one of the assistant managers—an educated young man recently recruited by Tagore—came to see me in the house-boat. He said he was willing to try such a scheme in Bhandargram, if I could assure him of an initial capital. I told him that I might be able to persuade the proprietors of the Agricultural Bank to supply capital not exceeding Rs. 2,000 (£150) if he sent me an application signed by at least twelve men of a single village stating definitely that they would form a co-operative society. I also promised to send him a book in which the principles of Raiffeissen Co-operative Banks are explained in detail.

17

Shelida,
Bengal
(1912)

To a Professor, University of Illinois, U.S.A.

From the enclosed photographs[1] you will at once notice the poor quality of Bengal cattle. They have a girth of chest varying from 4 to 5 feet and the live weight varies from 425 to 750 lb.! I believe the average live weight of your University stock is over 1,400 lb.

The old villagers say that there are clear indications of the deterioration of cattle in recent years due to the gradual encroachment upon grazing land and to a great scarcity of fodder. There is a common saying among the villagers: 'the cow's milk is in her mouth'. The villagers realize that their cattle are ill-fed, ill-housed

[1] Not reproduced here.

and ill-bred. Their complaints in regard to the shrinkage of grazing areas are genuine. What importance is attached to common pasture land in Indian economic life may be realized from the emphasis given to it in some of the Indian scriptures. Manu says :

'A belt of grazing land round each village, of a breadth measuring 400 cubits or of a breadth equal to three throws of a stick should be reserved on all sides, and three times that breadth round each town. There, if cattle injure any unenclosed paddy, the king shall not, in such cases, punish the cattle-keeper.'

Since most of the shortcomings of Indian agriculture (the condition of livestock in other provinces is equally deplorable) may be traced to the neglect of animal husbandry, I have proposed to Tagore that we should concentrate our work upon cattle-breeding and dairying. A dairy farm in this locality is not a feasible proposition on account of transport difficulties ; the Calcutta market must be within easy reach for the disposal of dairy products. In the meantime Majumdar is struggling with a small dairy in Santiniketan for supplying milk to the pupils and teachers of the institution. The soil conditions are such in that tract that he has had no success in growing the requisite amount of fodder and he cannot run the dairy on a profitable basis with the supply of feeding-stuffs from Calcutta.

No, I do not think it is possible to introduce small tractors here ; nor do I believe that their introduction would be of any great assistance in strengthening our agricultural economy. But there is great scope for the improvement of the indigenous ploughs. Tagore has, as you know, imported one planter junior and one disc plough but our plough-cattle cannot draw them ! The poor quality of our livestock is one of the main causes of agricultural backwardness, and yet Animal Husbandry as a subject of research has not received adequate attention from the Government. There cannot be any reasonable excuse for this gross

neglect of Animal Husbandry in a country where milk and milk-products constitute a large part in the people's dietary.

18

Surul (Bengal)
(1917)

To a friend in India.

About four years ago the Poet acquired a piece of property from Lord Sinha of Raipur with the object of building a suitable family residence in the neighbourhood of Santiniketan. But his son has now decided to start a motor business in Calcutta and I am asked to lay out an experimental farm here. . . . The essential need for its success is to make proper and adequate arrangement for irrigating the land. It is an expensive affair.

We are here on laterite soil. It is poor and very deficient in organic matter. The problem of increasing and maintaining soil-fertility in this district is therefore one of adequate supply of organic matter. Then there is this terrible soil-depletion through erosion.

From what I have been able to judge since my arrival here, I do not believe agriculture alone can be made profitable. The cultivators in the neighbourhood must have some sort of subsidiary occupation. I thought of diversified farming as a probable solution to this depressed agriculture; but not even the Divine Cow-herd[1] can succeed here in dairy farming with such poor cattle and insufficient fodder. Owing to transport difficulties, I do not think poultry and egg farming or market gardening would pay: these require well-organized marketing methods.

The possibility of a dairy, worked on the basis of co-operation with the villagers, should, however, be

[1] According to the Hindu Mythology, Krishna is the Divine Cow-herd.

explored. Majumdar has had some hard lessons for his job at Santiniketan where he is running a dairy. We had a long talk the other day. I tried to explain the distinction between dairy farming and dairy industry. Mere production of milk cannot be made a profitable concern in this tract where the livestock is to be stall-fed and good fodder is to be grown. Besides, the indigenous cattle are worthless and so are the dairymen. Majumdar has had to import both from up-country.

But a central co-operative dairy, run on factory lines, may be organized if we could enlist the co-operation of the neighbouring villages. The willing cattle owners have to be supplied with better live-stock and adequate facilities for its maintenance; the entire production will be bought by the dairy. I have promised to work out a detailed prospectus somewhat on the lines of the Irish Co-operative Creameries. As regards financing such a scheme, I do not know whom we should approach. —— suggests that the Hindusthan Co-operative Insurance Company may favourably consider a workable dairy proposition. I have my doubts in regard to securing financial assistance from that quarter.

At the moment I am busy laying out a plot for vegetable gardening. Ten cartloads of farmyard manure —bad stuff, having been kept without any shelter— have been purchased from the neighbouring villages.

Two American visitors from Santiniketan walked in this afternoon. I had nothing to show them except the frequent raids of *hanumans* (monkeys) to plunder my *brinjal*[1]*-crop*. The American lady was amused to hear from me why the villagers resented my shooting down these pests.

I took them to a neighbouring village. On our way down there, we met a village woman collecting

[1] The Egg-plant (*Solanum melongena*)

cattle dung and I had to explain what use would be made of such collections. The lady turned up her nose in contempt when I told her that dried cow dung was used as fuel for cooking purposes. To these poor villagers, this is a necessity which knows no law and ignores the contemptuous pose of foreign visitors. By the way, didn't British troops adopt these practices during the South African War ?

I am not defending this wasteful practice of burning farmyard manure which is one of the best means for maintaining the fertility of the soil. In your province there is a shortage of firewood and its supply is further restricted by the Forest Acts of the Government. This may be one of the reasons for the use of cow dung for fuel ; but I asked several villagers in Bengal about this habit and was told that for cooking purposes the slow cow-dung fire was preferable to that of coal.

19

Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1926)

To a friend in Great Britain.

Lord Irwin held a conference of Ministers and Directors of Agriculture at Simla and explained to them what his Government proposed to do in formulating an agricultural policy. He, of course, referred to the appointment of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture and made it clear that increased production by itself is of little avail, if not accompanied by a corresponding change in the economic organization of the agricultural industry. Great emphasis must be laid, I think, on the possibilities of re-adjusting the entire economic organization that touches the bulk of the Indian cultivator and of adopting such new measures as would satisfy the requirements of the industry in a world of ' commercialized agriculture '.

Agricultural research in India has made, though late in the field, some progress. But the problem here, as elsewhere, is to bring the results of researches not only to the knowledge of the cultivator but also to make it possible for them to adopt new and improved methods. Propaganda alone, however extensively it may be carried out, will not suffice under the existing state of rural economic organization. The Commission will have to make a searching enquiry into the co-operative movement initiated by the Government during Curzon's Viceroyalty. The objective of this movement should be to reconstruct the *entire* economic organization of the cultivator—from the task of providing him with adequate resources that may enable him to avail himself of improved technique of cultivation to the organized efforts for marketing agricultural products.

Our public men are critical of the terms of reference of the Commission which exclude the questions of land revenue and water rates in irrigated tracts. I do not think the latter question can be left out of our consideration. We need not go into the problems of the administration of the Irrigation Departments but it is necessary to examine the existing water rates.

As regards the land revenue I agree that it is far too complicated a problem for the Commission to take up. But I hope we shall be able to point out cases where its revision is necessary in the interest of the cultivator. Sooner or later, however, the land revenue policy of the Government has to be revised, but that may come about only when the leaders of public opinion in this country show *real* earnestness in fundamental land reforms. If the Agricultural Commission succeeds in forming such public opinion as is required for embarking upon a comprehensive policy of rural reconstruction in India, its mission will be amply fulfilled. And I repeat what I said to you in London :

Parliament must be held responsible for bringing about conditions of life which would ensure the economic prosperity of the bulk of our population.

20

Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1926)

To a friend in Great Britain.

. . .

Criticisms of the terms of the Commission and also of the Commission itself are pouring out in the Nationalist press. Pandit Motilal Nehru thought that the appointment of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture was indicative of the British Government's intention to perpetuate the Dyarchy and, to quote his own words, ' to put the agricultural population in such a condition of dependence upon the bureaucracy as to alienate them from the political class and deflect them from the pursuit of *Swaraj* to which they now pin their faith '. Then there is the usual platitude —that India needs Industrial development; that agriculture alone cannot ameliorate the depressing conditions of the millions; that the Agricultural Commission's sole object is to keep India in the state of mere producers of ' raw materials ' for the benefit of the British industrialists, and so on.

Some of our imaginative journalists predict that the outcome of this Commission will be a steady flow of British agricultural machinery and chemical fertilizers! What a wonderful insight these men have into the agricultural conditions of the country! And on these men this country has to depend for rural rehabilitation!

A Calcutta journal suggests that ' the main object of any agricultural enquiry in India ought to be to study and investigate the nutritional situation and its agricultural basis '. Years ago a German author

remarked in his book on Indian agriculture that a thorough investigation of the nutritional system of India was necessary. The inspiration of the Calcutta journal may have come from this source. I wonder if the editor of this journal knows anything about Lieut.-Colonel McCarrison's nutritional researches in the Institute of Pasteur, Conoor.

Those who take a pessimistic view of this enquiry into ' the main factors affecting the rural prosperity and welfare of the agricultural population ' fail to realize that during our investigations and after the submission of the report, the problems of Indian rural economy will be widely discussed; and such discussions are, indeed, helpful in forming public opinion in favour of required changes in the social and economic structure.

I am suggesting to our Chairman that the questionnaire, when finally drawn up, should be translated into three or four vernaculars and attempts should be made to secure the views of *village elders* from the various provinces. Perhaps it may not be a practical proposition to get them to send memoranda! In any case, we shall actually visit a number of typical villages throughout British India.

21

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Hadaspar, Bombay Presidency
(1926)

From my Journal.

Yesterday Mr. G. K. Devadhar, of the Servants of India Society, came to see me. From the record of success of the Co-operative Movement he related to me, I was eagerly looking forward to the visit to Hadaspar.

Hadaspar is a village at a distance of nearly five miles from Poona, and has a population of nearly

five thousand including the inhabitants of neighbouring hamlets. While the chief occupation of the villagers is agriculture, there are a number of artisans and labourers who occupy a permanent place in the rural economy of the village. Cultivation depends upon the irrigation from the Mutha Canal. Of the intensive crops grown in the irrigated areas, sugarcane takes the prominent place.

But irrigation alone could not have achieved such success in raising the standard of living of the people. The barren minds of the villagers had to be irrigated by introducing a co-operative movement in the village. That initiative came from a leading member of the village community, who, sixteen years ago, with the help of a few intelligent villagers, sowed the seed of co-operation. As is the case elsewhere, the beginning had to be made by starting a co-operative credit society; but the credit society did not confine its activities to the obvious function of supplying credit to its members. Within the period of sixteen years the efforts of a few pioneers proved that a single organized co-operative credit society, founded on the sound basis of the people's awakened common sense, could prepare the ground for other co-operative activities. The stimulus and guidance of the movement at its initial stage came from Mr. G. K. Devadhar, of the Servants of India Society. He arranged for us to meet some of the members who were intimately connected with the co-operative movement at Hadaspar.

The meeting was arranged in a building owned by the credit society and with Mr. Devadhar acting as the interpreter we held a conversation with some of the members of the co-operative credit society. The membership had gradually risen from 30 to 142 of which at least fifteen were women. The managing committee consisted of seven members including one woman. The classification of members according

to caste and creed was interesting. There were four Brahmins thirty-six Malis, eighty Marathas, and the rest came from washermen, barbers, tailors, *mahars*, *chamars*,[1] and Christian and Muslim communities. There was no truth whatever in the alleged difficulty of caste in organizing the movement. I believe that the co-operative movement can be of great service to the Hindu community if they intend to get rid of the curse of Untouchability.

The proof that the members had cultivated thrift was shown by the figures of the deposits. The manager of the Society, in a statement submitted to us, showed that more than Rs. 44,000 (£3,300) stood as members' deposits. But deposits from non-members showed more than double the amount obtained from members. The turnover of the society had increased from Rs. 9,420 (£706) in the first year to about Rs. 350,000 (£26,250) in 1925. The working capital consisted of a gift of Rs. 200 (£15) from a philanthropist and a Government loan of Rs. 2,000 (£150) and the figure at the time of our visit was Rs. 2 *lakhs* (£15,000). The rate of interest charged for the members was a little over 9 per cent per annum. The members realized fully the importance of regular and punctual payments and there were rarely cases which had to be referred to arbitration. The society had a large Reserve Fund which stood at about Rs. 50,000 (£3,750). But the fact which struck me most was the confidence which this society had succeeded in establishing in the village, a proof of which was clear from the deposits obtained from non-members. The usual charge that social obligations, such as marriage, imposed, were one of the potent causes of heavy indebtedness of the Indian peasantry was disproved at least in this instance by an analysis of the loans from this society. It was pointed out

[1] These are 'untouchables'.

to us that out of total loans of Rs. 156,317 (£11,723), only the sum of Rs. 150 (£11 5s.) was expended in marriages.

Out of this nucleus of a co-operative society considerable agricultural improvements had been effected in the village. The sugar-cane growers had adopted, to a large extent, the methods advocated by the Department of Agriculture; iron ploughs had been introduced; wells had been sunk in the tracts where canal water was not available, and the cultivators were incorporating a number of restorative crops in rotation.

As regards the other activities the supply of manure and everyday requirements is obtained through co-operative societies organized for the purpose. Through the initiative of Rao Saheb Govindarao Kale, a Sale Society for the disposal of *gur* had been organized.

But perhaps the most significant indication of the success of the movement lay in the fact that it had considerably influenced public life. For instance, we were told that there had been a substantial increase in the number of children, both boys and girls, attending school. The Society had itself collected nearly Rs. 4,000 (£300) in order to form a nucleus of the fund known as the Secondary Education Fund. There was a library and a building which stood out as an example of corporate efforts towards the education of the villagers. Side by side with the growth of economic solidarity, which must come with co-operative finance, there had sprung up all these signs of re-vitalized life in a rural community. I must also mention the service which this little village rendered to the Empire during the Great War. More than thirty recruits were sent from it, while the Co-operative Credit Society contributed about Rs. 11,000 (£825) to the War Loan Fund.

Thus, out of a small effort by a few leading members of this village community within the short period of

sixteen years, the Co-operative Movement has established itself in this rural area ; and it is this movement which has laid the foundation of citizenship along the scheme of a well-directed economic organization. I am a great believer in the future of the co-operative movement. It really offers a solution by which rural interests may successfully compete with that of the commercial world. The equilibrium between urban and rural civilization could also be restored through the proper guidance of the co-operative movement. Can we drive home this truth to those who have so far shown only lip-sympathy to the movement ?

22

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Poona
(1926)

From my Journal.

——— holds the view that the condition of the peasants in the Bombay Deccan was as good as that of the English peasants at the beginning of the nineteenth century and that the Land Revenue system of the present Government was the root of all mischief. He went on to describe how their policy of levying heavy initial assessments was affecting the Deccan peasantry. Curiously enough, he seems to favour the permanent settlement as obtaining in Bengal.

I gave him a bare outline of the conditions of the Bengal peasantry and ventured to assert that so long as landlords insisted on exacting feudal dues and services in addition to rent proper, so long as nothing is done for the tenantry, there must remain a chronic fear of agrarian revolt. Bengal maintains a host of intermediaries between the Government and the cultivator and the system that tolerates such complicated land tenures is economically unsound. I was informed

that there existed intermediaries also under the *ryotwari* system.

I am beginning to see that *real* agricultural reform cannot make much headway unless the Indian land systems are brought in conformity to the needs of modern agriculture. This evening I spoke about it to a wealthy Bombay merchant; but he was not prepared to admit that the revision of land tenures was immediately necessary for agricultural progress.

Well—' one step enough for me '. Let us see what deficiencies we find in Indian agricultural economy. And then our public opinion may be roused to demand, not fitful efforts towards land reform, but unrestricted peasant proprietorship of land. The bulwark of feudal aristocracy, large and small, would be too stubborn and resistant for such measures. But how long can we ignore the inescapable logic of modern economic history?

Then there is this problem of population. Dr. Mann's study of the village of Jategaon Budruk[1] showed that only eight families had sufficient income from the land they owned; twenty-eight families lived from hand to mouth supplementing their income from sources other than agriculture; and sixty-seven families were in a hopeless situation.

K—— told me about another Deccan village where careful economic enquiries were made. There in normal seasons ten families lived on the produce of their land; twelve depended on employment in industrial centres and 125 families were living as the serfs of the village *bania*. That is, in both the villages the bulk of the people lived perpetually on the verge of poverty. And the type of poverty we see in these villages is definitely a social peril, for it involves both economic loss and loss of self-respect.

[1] See No. 4, pp. 7 ff.

23

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Dacca, Bengal
(1927)

From my Journal.

At Dacca we had the opportunity of attending a Conference of Co-operative Workers. The conference was held in the spacious hall of the new Government House at Ramna. In recent years the Co-operative Movement has made some progress in the district of Dacca, and this was the first conference convened by the organizers. Judging from the enthusiasm that prevailed throughout the proceedings, one could feel that the Movement had caught the imagination of the people. The gathering was impressive in the sense that on this common platform of the Co-operative Movement the rural and urban representatives, landlords and tenants, officials and non-officials had come together.

But one would like to see on such occasions men who had carefully studied the problems of the Co-operative Movement so as to give it the necessary direction. Neither doctrinaire politicians nor economists can be of any use in guiding this movement.

The Hon. Nawab Bahadur Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, the Minister of Agriculture, sent his speech to be read by the Commissioner of the Dacca Division. Here is an extract from the speech :

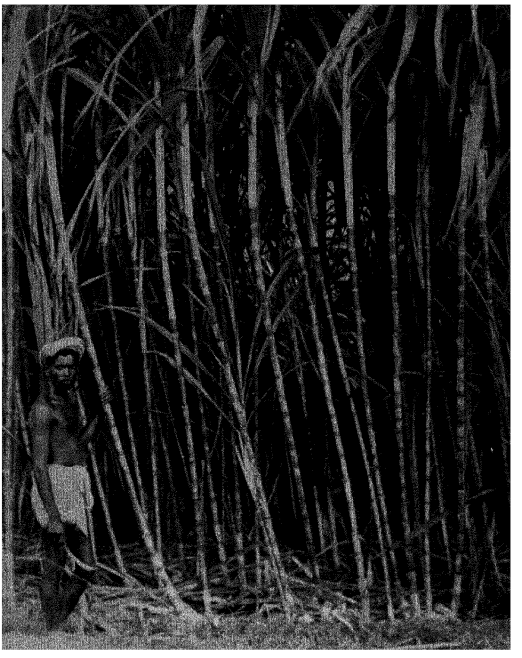
' There is as much danger to officialization or departmentalization of the Co-operative Movement as there is to placing the direction of the Movement in the hands of people who are not agriculturists themselves and who do not belong to the same class even though they may be non-officials. My advice to you, both official and non-official co-operative workers, is to so direct the movement as to lead to the development of village leaders, leaders who will be able to manage things for themselves without the assistance of either officials or non-officials not belonging to their class.'

A sound note of warning, I thought.

Lord Linlithgow gave a suitable reply to the address of welcome presented to the Commission. His lordship observed :

' It is necessary that the humblest member of the smallest primary society should understand what co-operation means. You may be able to bolster up the movement for a period by the kindness of educated men who are willing to give their time in directing the destiny of primary societies ; but however much outside help may be necessary in the earlier stages of the society's life, it may be superseded sooner or later, and the sooner the better, by the active management of the society by its members through its elected committee. If your Co-operative Movement here in Bengal fails on its educative side, it will fail in its first purpose. Unless you succeed in making the members of co-operative societies better men, better cultivators, and better citizens, by reason of their membership, then however much you may succeed in effecting their economic improvement you will fail in the first objective of co-operation.'

These words were very appropriate, especially at this period of growth of the movement. In Bengal, as it is the case elsewhere, in India, the Co-operative Movement was introduced as an essentially credit organization with the result that about 90 per cent of the total number of societies in the province are credit societies. We are told that the sum of about Rs. 4·25 *crores* or some £3 millions is now employed in the movement as a whole, and it is gratifying to note that about Rs. 1·64 *crores* or £1¼ million come from the members and societies in the province. While the facilities of short term credit have greatly expanded, the demand for long term loans remains unsatisfied. There is only one land mortgage bank in the province, and in this conference it was pointed out that occasionally members of a co-operative society had to go to *Mahajans* for long term loans. The time has come to institute such banks so that members of co-operative societies may obtain long term loans either for the redemption of old debts or for the improvement of land.



SUGAR CANE IN BENGAL

DRYING JUTE IN BENGAL

[face page 57

The conference resolved that audit cess should not be levied on co-operative societies, but should come from the Government. The necessity of maintaining an efficient staff in the co-operative department was fully realized by the conference, and it was held that candidates should be carefully selected. The success of the entire movement depends on men who come in contact with the primary societies.

The conference recommended that every central bank should be asked to make arrangements for the supply of better kinds of seed and manure to members of credit societies.

That the moral uplift of members was not forgotten was clear from the resolution which advocated incorporation in the by-laws of the co-operative societies and banks that no persons addicted to intoxicating drink or drug should be eligible to their membership; and this resolution was moved by a Muslim worker of the co-operative movement.

In the evening, two gentlemen from the University of Dacca came to see me. Both of them were very keen on the growth of the co-operative movement in Bengal, but they thought that unless the unit of social organization, that is, the village, was revitalized, the masses would receive no substantial benefit from the co-operative movement. One of them was rather critical of its official sponsors. He maintained that the political stage of India had shown many a drastic change of scene, but the social order had remained intact from the ancient times up to the first decade of the nineteenth century. The productive basis of this old social order was agriculture, coupled with hand industry, and this industry should be revived by deliberate State action.

All this discussion was very refreshing; and it helps me to realize the magnitude of the task that lies before the future Government of the country.

I have been trying to find out the proportion of *solvent* peasants in Bengal. In the Settlement Reports of certain districts, one finds the peasantry classified under such terms as ' in comfort ' ; ' well-to-do ' ; ' below comfort ' ; ' in want ' ; and so on. Perhaps the cultivators living ' in comfort ' may be considered as being solvent. According to the late Mr. Jack's analysis of the Faridpur district, about one-half of the cultivators are, then, solvent. His classification is based on an average annual income of Rs. 300 (£22) for a family of five members[1] living ' in comfort ' ; and of Rs. 135 (£10) for a family living ' in want '. I have not as yet been able to get figures for the Dacca district.

24

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Patna (Bihar and Orissa)
(1927)

To a colleague in the University of Calcutta.

In the house of the Hon. Sacchidananda Sinha, I met several gentlemen whom one might describe as ' landed gentry '. One of them spoke eloquently about the Bihar peasants' attachment to the soil, and his advice to the Agricultural Commission would be to explore the possibilities of satisfying the land-hunger of the peasantry. Others found a solution in relieving land of excessive pressure of population, and they would industrialize India for the purpose. When pressed for my own views on these questions, I said that the peasants' attachment to a bit of land is not so much the love of possessing a bit of land, but it is the mode of life which that possession allows him to live. There has grown up a strong cohesion between agricultural

[1] Two adult males, one adult female, one boy and one girl.

pursuits and the village life. On the other hand, with tiny strips of land, and with numerous economic and social handicaps, the bulk of our peasantry cannot even eke a bare existence out of their occupation. Calculate the cost of cultivation, rents, taxes, and interest on loans, as against the production of crops, their prices, middlemen's profits, and prices for the commodities the peasants need, and you will see that for the peasants to live on the earnings of their land is an arithmetical impossibility.

Yes, this attachment to the land is a universal trait in the peasantry of all countries. The French peasant, for instance, calls his land ' his mistress ' ! Here is an extract from a French author, Michelet :

' If we would know the inmost thoughts, the passion, of the French peasant, it is very easy. Let us walk out on Sunday into the country and follow him . . . I perceive that he is going to visit his mistress.

' What mistress ? His land.

' I do not say he is going straight to it. No, he is free to-day, and may either go or not. Does he not go every day in the week ? Accordingly, he turns aside, he goes another way, he has business elsewhere, and yet he goes.

' It is true, he was passing close by ; it was an opportunity. He looks, but apparently he will not go in ; what for ? And yet he enters.

' At least, it is probable that he will not work ; he is in his Sunday dress , he has a clean kerchief and blouse. Still, there is no harm in plucking up this weed, and throwing out that stone. There is a stump, too, which is in the way ; but he has not his tools with him, he will do it to-morrow.

' Then he folds his arms and gazes, serious and careful. He gives a long, very long, look, and seems lost in thought. At last, if he thinks himself observed, if he sees a passer-by, he moves slowly away. Thirty paces off he stops, turns round, and casts on his land a last look, sombre and profound, but to those who can see it, the look is full of passion, of heart, of devotion.'

Do you know Tagore's poem, ' Just an acre ' ? There the poet describes the feelings of a peasant who has been ejected from his land by his landlord.

25

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Patna (Bihar and Orissa)
(1927)

To the Secretary of an Economic Organization in Patna :

I read with interest the prospectus of your organization and was glad to know that your programme of work included rural surveys.

North Bihar is one of the densely populated tracts of India ; and it seems to me that the law of diminishing returns has been in operation for some time, but there has been no change in the type of Agriculture. While the growing of specialized crops and the development of animal husbandry may relieve the situation to a certain extent, the greatest need is the development of industries. Sugar products are there but not in a flourishing state ! I think the matter of the sugar industry should be placed before the Tariff Board.

Some of the cottage industries may flourish in this Province (Bihar and Orissa) if they are given necessary assistance and direction. The Registrar of the Co-operative Societies thought that the Tassar Silk Industry and Pottery had made some progress. Nearly 4,000 silk looms are at work.

The silk is reeled from the cocoons and the daily output is about 2 *chitalls* a day per reeler. Generally the women do this work. Owing to this low rate of output of yarn the weavers are forced to remain idle for months. The Department of Industries, I understand, have been experimenting with various types of reeling machines for increasing the output and improving the quality of silk-yarn.

You know there is a prevalent custom among the orthodox Hindus not to use an earthen vessel for the second time. Therefore it is necessary to have cheap earthenware. I suppose that this custom may be one of the factors that preserves the ancient potter's wheel !

But what is now needed is a better wheel and an efficient kiln. We saw a treadle driven wheel in the Punjab which the potters found very convenient.

Among certain classes of the Bihar villagers, basket making from bamboo and reed is the chief means of livelihood; it supports about 150,000 of the rural population of the province. But, Japanese split bamboo chinks with attractive designs and coloured mats are entering our markets and our homes! This industry is largely in the hands of the 'untouchables' and the Department of Industries have not as yet given much thought to it. I wonder why the success anticipated by the Industrial Commission from the establishment of provincial Departments of Industries has not been achieved in any Province. Bengal has at least moved in the right direction and showed signs of life. I feel these departments should be reminded of their primary duty, namely, promotion of cottage and rural industries. Why should the Indian Steel Wire Products Company have received state-aid in the shape of a big loan and not these industries?

Your economic society may usefully spend some time and money in regional surveys of the Province in relation to the prospects of small-scale industries. Such surveys would be extremely helpful to the public and you will incidentally wake up your Department of Industries!

26

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Jorhat (Assam)
(1927)

From my Journal.

The journey to Jorhat was profitably spent in the company of two Assamese agricultural officers. I learnt a great deal from them, particularly about the kind of cottage industries for which special facilities existed in the Province.

Both officers regretted the growing symptoms of impoverishment of the villager, which they attributed to (1) limitations of agricultural development, (2) absence of subsidiary occupations and (3) epidemic of *Kala-azar*. Our conversation, thereupon, turned on cottage industries.

Assam is the home of Eri-Silk. The silk producing worm feeds on the castor plant (*Ricinus communis*) and is domesticated. The climate is an ideal one for the growth of silk and the worm is prolific ; the rearing is a simple task. Silk-worm rearing and silk weaving are important occupations for women, while men are engaged in the cultivation of crops—a desirable combination of agriculture and industry.

But the chief trouble is *Kata* (pebrine) which has seriously hit the silk industry. There are a number of nurseries from where the pebrine-free seeds are distributed, but the supply is inadequate. Of the other handicaps these are considered to be rather serious : defective rearing-houses, crude methods of reeling, lack of credit facilities and a marketing system. The latter is largely controlled by the *Paikars* who advance money for cocoon-rearing and silk production, and take the produce. These *Paikars* are usually the agents of the *Mahajans*.

One of the officers mentioned the alarming fact of increasing imports of artificial silk-yarn and piece goods of cotton and artificial silk. But there seems to be a difference of opinion in regard to a weakening of demand of Assam silk as a result of these imports.

The development of fruit gardens and a further extension of tea cultivation was the next theme of our conversation. Tea, it was suggested, had almost come to the limit of expansion for the present ; but there was a great scope for fruit cultivation. Out of $23\frac{1}{2}$ million acres ' cultivable ' land, only $6\frac{1}{4}$ million acres are under crop in Assam. A portion of this land could easily be utilized for orchards, but the chief difficulty lies in quick transport.

In the library of the Indian Tea Association at Tocklai, I came across an interesting book in which the writer—one Walter Hamilton—gave an account of Assam and of other parts of India in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Here are some of his observations on the silk industry of Assam :

' No less than four different kinds of silk-worms are reared, silks of several varieties forming great part of the native clothing, besides leaving a surplus for exportation.' The flourishing state of the Assam silk industry may be realized from his account that ' the native women of all castes, from the Queen downwards, wear the four kinds of silk produced in the country, and with which three-fourths of the people are clothed ; the rich only dressing in cottons, mostly imported from Dacca. Considerable quantities of the two coarser kinds are exported.'

' The raw material is seldom purchased, each family spinning and weaving the silk which it rears ; and petty dealers go round and purchase for ready money whatever can be spared for exportation, or for the use of the few persons who do not rear their own silk-worms.'

But this silk industry is in a decadent state now and the Government have not done anything for its revival. It is a depressing record that about one per cent of the total provincial expenditure is allotted to the Department of Agriculture. Our trustees have forgotten 97·7 per cent of the total population of Assam who live in these gloomy villages numbering over 30,000. Kala-azar is the best friend the indigent Assamese have !

27

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Jullundar, The Punjab
(1927)

From my Journal.

The district lies in the submontane tract between the Central Division and the mountainous region of

the Punjab. As this tract does not receive irrigation from the Punjab Canal system, agriculture is dependent on well irrigation. The soil is fertile; but because of its fertility the pressure of population on the cultivated area is as high as 400 to 500 persons to the square mile. This is one of the districts in the Punjab which is rather heavily indebted. Mr. Darling says that in the districts of Jullundar and Hoshiarpur 'the net mortgage debt is over 60 per cent of the whole as against only 37 per cent in the North, and less than 30 per cent in the South of the Punjab'. The Central Co-operative Bank was registered in 1909, and it is the oldest central bank in the province. In that year it was started with ten individuals and its present membership consisted of eighty individuals holding about 1,325 shares, 575 societies holding about 750 shares, and nine unions holding about 100 shares. The bank was run strictly on co-operative principles and it had always a non-official president, which was not the case in most of the central banks in the Punjab.

It was pointed out to us by the Directors of the Central Bank and the representatives of the constituent societies that there was no trouble in getting capital for the Bank; that it had a surplus exceeding Rs. 2 lakhs (£15,000). The popularity of the Bank among the well-to-do citizens of Jullundar might be due to the fact that this Bank held municipal bonds to the extent of over Rs. 21 lakhs (£157,000), and that it had never paid dividend less than 10 per cent. This Bank did not allow long term loans for land mortgage redemption and some of the directors felt that there was need for land mortgage banks in the district.

Turning to the agricultural problems of the district, it was held that the chief difficulty in regard to crop production was irrigation. They were alarmed at the gradual sinking of the water-level with the result that the construction of wells had considerably decreased. Even in the case of existing wells, the chief problem

was to lift water economically. It was urged that the Government might sink tube wells and distribute water to the tenants in the same way as was being done in the case of canal irrigation.

The excessive pressure of population on the cultivated area is sought to be relieved by the development of certain 'cottage industries'. Some of these are organized by co-operation. The first Co-operative Society that we visited was the Society of Weavers, situated in the vicinity of Jullundar, known as Mohalla-Said Kabir,[1] an appropriate name for a locality where a majority of the inhabitants make a living out of weaving.

The Society was registered in 1912 and its present membership is about thirty-seven. We visited the homes of a number of these weavers, and found that each of them had set up one or two looms. Every member of the family was engaged in the industry, but the looms were run by men. Some of the weavers we visited prepared cotton-silk cloth. There was not much demand for pure silk material and such mixed qualities as were turned out by these villagers had a ready market. The Society worked on industrial lines, i.e. loans were advanced in the shape of raw materials. So far, the Society purchased about Rs. 97,000 (£7,275) worth of raw material and sold it to members at a small margin profit, which I understood exceeded Rs. 5,000 (£375). The disposal of finished products from the looms was also undertaken by the Society, and through collective marketing the members got a better price. The benefit of co-operative methods of production and distribution was realized by the members, and it is hoped that this society would soon become independent of outside help. The success of

[1] Mohalla-Said Kabir. A section of the town named after the Hindu saint Kabir (1440-1518) who was brought up by a Mohammedan weaver called Miru.

the organization among the illiterate weavers was reflected in the fact that there has been no defaulter since the beginning of the Society, and repayment of loans was very satisfactory. Every member was required to deposit at least Re. 1 (1s. 6d.) per month, which constituted his saving.

Inspired by the success of the Co-operative Weavers' organization, the shoemakers of the Basti Guzan organized their business under a Co-operative Society. This Society had just then been registered, and within the limited period of its existence, had already convinced its members of the benefit of working co-operatively. The Managing Committee purchased the raw materials and also collected finished products which they disposed of either in the local market or in Lahore. So far, the Society has made a turnover of about Rs. 8,000 (£600), which had left a profit of Rs. 400 (£30) to the Society.

The working skill of some of these shoemakers is praiseworthy. If some arrangement could be made for the introduction of some of the modern machines for the manufacture of leather and its products, they would have successfully competed in the market. The Punjab industrialists should offer these shoemakers the necessary facilities for training, and such an investment would certainly prove to be profitable from the industrial point of view. An inter-provincial trade in boots and shoes could certainly be developed if these shoemakers were given the facilities of an up-to-date manufacturing plant and the capital required therefor. Nothing succeeds like success. The examples furnished by these societies induced the wood-workers of the city of Jullundar to organize a Co-operative Society of their own. In this Basti Shaikh we saw some of the members at work in their homes and one of them told us that through the Co-operative Society they were now free from any debts to sowcars. The Movement has a greater potentiality than that of economic gain, but

the illiteracy of the people stands in the way of bringing about all the blessings it promises. We moved from one *basti* to another and had a glimpse of many cottage industries which were being developed in the neighbourhood of Jullundar. But none fascinated me more than the potter's wheel which we saw at work in a *basti* of potters. The manipulation of a lump of clay in the hands of an old man with his son diligently preparing the clay lump and passing it on to his father for giving it various shapes would make a realistic picture of the unchanging East! The twentieth century has given us many inventions and mechanisms; but the potter's wheel still remains undisturbed. . . .

The Department of Industries in the Punjab seems to be more active than that of other provinces. The smallholder cannot live in comfort without any subsidiary occupation. In Japan 96 per cent of farmers own less than 8 acres, but most of them have some sort of subsidiary occupation.

28

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Madar, Punjab
(1927)

From my Journal.

We visited the Madar Co-operative Credit Union which is the oldest union in India. More than a thousand cultivators from its constituent societies had come to meet the Commission. It was indeed a very striking gathering, in which one could see a conglomeration of the various races of the Punjab. But the prominent groups were the Jats and Arains—indeed noble specimens of the Punjab peasantry. The Jats, to quote the description of a Punjab Settlement officer, are 'unremitting in toil, thrifty to the verge of parsimony, self-reliant in adversity and enterprising in prosperity, and an ideal cultivator and revenue

payer'. The Arain is a market gardener and very industrious. Mr. Darling says: 'for sheer ant-like industry there is no one in the Punjab to touch the Arain'. A Punjab proverb says, 'for cattle give me the cow, for a cultivator give me the Arain'. The peasants came to the gathering arrayed in the best of their clannish costumes!

It was not possible for us to hold a meeting for the purpose of eliciting information about the position of the co-operative societies from the members themselves. But the President of the Union submitted an interesting account from which it was possible to gain a clear idea of the actual working of the Union. All the villages lying within the jurisdiction of the police stations, namely, Adampur, Kartapur, and Bhogpur, were served by this Union. There were altogether ninety-six societies on the roll, and all the members of the societies affiliated to the Union have now almost completely extricated themselves from the clutches of the money-lenders. The activities of the Union extended to about eighty villages, and the co-operative movement had really succeeded in reducing the indebtedness of the members.

It is interesting to note that this Union was formed before such Unions could legally be registered. The expansion of credit societies since the passing of the Act of 1904 gave rise to higher forms of co-operative organizations of which the present Union was a good example. The Co-operative Societies Act of 1912 legalized, for the first time, the registration of such Unions. These central agencies form a very important part in the co-operative movement, and without their assistance it is impossible to supervise and assist the movement in the right direction. Each affiliated society held a share in the Union, and the financial position of the Union was gradually improving. It had invested nearly half a lakh of rupees (£3,750) in Government paper, and its reserve fund amounted to about

Rs. 35,000 (£2,625). The Union advanced loans for the sinking of wells in the areas where holdings had been consolidated at a reduced rate of 7 per cent. Many of the affiliated societies had so improved their own status that already twenty-three of them were independent of the help of the Union, and fifteen had actually deposited their surplus fund with the Union.

We were told that all co-operators belonging to the Union desired consolidation of holdings. This is one of the stupendous feats which co-operation is trying to achieve in the Punjab ; but whether the object may be achieved through co-operation or legislation, it *is* one of the essential conditions of the future improvement of Indian agriculture. Holdings by themselves too small to admit of improved and scientific methods of agriculture are further subjected to fragmentation by the laws of succession and inheritance of both the Muslim and Hindu communities, and the method of fragmentation generally adopted is such that a man, owning two acres of land, will seldom have his holding in one whole block, but scattered about piecemeal over a radius of ten or twelve miles or sometimes even more. Even with the best of intentions to cultivate his lands properly, the owner of this scattered holding will not be able to do it unless he multiplied his establishment and machinery, which would, of course, be hopelessly uneconomic. This, therefore, acts as an almost insurmountable hindrance to the adoption of better methods of farming, and what co-operation seeks to do in the Punjab, and legislation in Bombay, is to group the scattered and uneconomic holdings of a person into blocks of such size as would facilitate economic and improved cultivation. The economic value of such an arrangement as this is indeed great ; but the procedure involves acts of ejection and expropriation which will present the greatest difficulty to persuade the agriculturist to accept without demur. Nor can the Government adopt more than a limited measure of

coercion inasmuch as it violates the very fundamental aspects of the law of private property and the only possible method in which the problem can be tackled is through persuasive demonstration of the practical advantages of consolidated holdings by means of co-operation. We were told that the chief difficulty was the opposition that came from the recalcitrant minority. The department concerned with the work of consolidation, we understood, proposed to enforce arrangements accepted by a 90 per cent majority owning at least 75 per cent of the land which came under the scheme of consolidation. I could see in this movement the beginning of an important agricultural reform which might eventually be reinforced by legislation.

But neither legislation nor co-operation can radically cure the disease so long as the germs which are the cause of it still remain in the body politics of the society. A consolidated holding is not a safeguard against the operation of the laws of inheritance and succession in the future, unless it be specifically arranged in these laws that property in land shall remain impartible in an issue of succession or inheritance and that the beneficiaries to the partition shall be entitled only to a money value of the share of the land. The eldest male member of the family shall have for himself the possession of the land, and shall be responsible to discharging the claims of the other members by payment of an estimated money value of their respective shares. In the absence of sufficient financial resources, it shall be the duty of the Government to advance him a loan to meet his requirements, and this loan shall come legitimately within the scope of agricultural improvements. Unless such measures as this are taken up in right earnest, it will be impossible for Indian agriculture to raise itself from the level of subsistence farming to one of sufficient competence and efficiency to meet the demands of the world market. During the pre-British period India had neither a strong

stable Government nor easy communication. The self-sufficiency of the village was rather forced upon it.

We have been discussing among ourselves the problem of consolidation of holdings. It cannot entirely be left to the individual or to co-operative effort, and must sooner or later be taken up by the Indian legislatures. But that will probably come about when a severe agricultural crisis will raise the country to face the problem with the help of law.

29

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Adampur, Punjab
(1927)

From my Journal.

We are here to get an idea of the working of the Co-operative Society formed with the object of consolidating fragmented holdings of the members. This Society was the result of a detailed enquiry conducted in the Punjab by Mr. Calvert into the condition of 2,400 villages scattered throughout the province. He had found that about 18 per cent of the owners owned less than one acre. He estimated the total number of such owners in the province at 625,000, and the area held at 313,000 acres. Of the total number of cultivators in the province, 22·6 per cent cultivated less than one acre. The number of these cultivators was estimated at 904,000 and the area so cultivated at 435,000 acres. After the enquiry, Mr. Calvert attempted to solve the difficulty by forming co-operative societies for consolidation. So far, 255 societies have been formed with nearly 13,000 members. We were also informed that about 90,000 fragmented holdings were consolidated into 16,400 within a period of six years. The movement is confined to three districts, Jullundar, Gurudaspur, and Hoshiarpur, of which about 100 societies were in the Jullundar district.

The movement was, however, found to spread into Sialkot and Gujarat districts. In 1928, as many as 122 new societies were formed and the area consolidated was over 64,000 acres. The average size of a block also increased from 1·16 to 7·3 acres.

The method adopted by the special staff appointed by the Government for this duty is somewhat on the following lines. A great deal of propaganda is first undertaken in the districts in which the people are not familiar with the idea. The cultivators are then asked to form an association and discuss how their holdings may be consolidated. With the help of the staff, the land is classified and a general scheme for repartition is then formulated. When all the land within the area has thus been redistributed, each owner gets a parcha (Memo) showing the numbers and acres of the fields held by him before and after the proposed consolidation. The staff also prepares a detailed plan (Shajra) giving the measurements and outlines of the new plots. The next step is to enter each holding in a mutation register, which is done by the Sub-Inspectors of the Punjab Co-operative Union. No society is registered until repartition has been fully carried out, with consequential changes in revenue papers.

The staff engaged in this work consists of seven inspectors and more than fifty sub-inspectors. The cost to the Government of this work varies from Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 per day; but the amount will be recouped during the period of a fresh settlement.

At the villages of Adampur and Chomi we met some of the members of the societies for consolidation of holdings, and they expressed appreciation of the advantages derived from consolidation. One of the chief advantages they stated was that the area which was dry (barani) and grew no crops on account of its being held in small bits has now become *chahi* (i.e. land irrigated by wells). In the tract where consolidation has been successfully carried out, as many as 100 new

wells have been sunk, with the result that the character of cultivation has become intensive. In the district of Jullundar alone, nearly 400 wells have been repaired since the commencement of the consolidation of holdings. These holdings are, however, far from being considered as economic ; but a beginning so well made has decidedly bright prospects for the future.

The success of consolidation in the districts referred to is perhaps due largely to the homogeneous character of the people and to the absence of the complexities arising out of traditional vested rights and encumbrances. I do not think that the conditions obtaining in Jullundar are to be found in any district in Bengal. At any rate, while the scheme adopted by the Punjab is undoubtedly promising, I am of the opinion that the movement can be greatly strengthened by some form of permissive legislation. Mr. Strickland, the Registrar of the Co-operative Movement, told us how months of labour of the staff was often entirely wasted through the stubbornness of an individual. But such recalcitrant minorities are gradually beginning to realize the benefit to be derived from the adoption of a scheme of consolidation. The last official report gave an account of two villagers who regretted their obstinacy and one of them ' even offered to submit himself to the penance of a shoe-beating by his wife in the presence of the whole village '.

The advantages of consolidation in changing the character of Indian agriculture are so obvious that I am convinced that the Government would be justified in supporting this movement by a power of legislation. In the meantime, the rest of India may well follow the example of this movement in the Punjab, which is certainly gaining in popularity. We were told that in order to quicken the pace of progress, the Punjab Government had decided to grant a partial remission of land revenue of the holdings subjected to consolidation. We were also informed by the co-operative

organizers that the movement had touched about one-third of the population and two-thirds of the villages in the district. A fertile soil, a moderate rainfall, a hardworking peasantry, intensive cropping, and the persistent efforts of the Department of Co-operation have combined in achieving this degree of success in the Punjab.

30

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Sonepet, nr. Delhi
(1927)

From my Journal.

It took us more than two hours to reach the village of Sonepet from Delhi by motor. Our object was to visit the Co-operative Union, Land Mortgage Bank, and the Co-operative Commission Shop. There was a fair gathering of the members in the compound of the Co-operative Union and the Mortgage Bank. A meeting of the members of the Co-operative Society was held under a shamiana, where the Commission was welcomed by the President of *Chamars*'[1] Co-operative Society. These people, although illiterate, were considered to be excellent co-operators, i e. they were prompt in their repayments and appreciated the advantage of being free from the traditional bondage to the money-lenders. The President of this Society declared that one of the significant tendencies among the members of the Society was to reduce their old debts. The prevailing rate of interest charged by the money-lenders was 36 per cent ; but the Society could obtain loans from the Co-operative Union and distribute money amongst its members at a much lower rate of interest. The accounts of the Society were being kept by the Honorary Secretary, who was not a member, and I was particularly happy to learn that this Honorary

[1] One of the Depressed Classes.

Secretary, who was assisting the Chamars' Society, was a Brahmin.

One by one the leading members of several rural credit societies then gave accounts of the position of their societies. Most of their societies were more than seven years old, and the average number of members in each society was about thirty. They were all affiliated to the Union and enjoyed all of the advantages derived from their association with a Central Society. For a period of three years the rate of interest was about 12½ per cent. Although the period of three years was the longest period allowed, it had been found necessary to allow members to re-borrow, if necessary, within that period. Every tenth year the profits of their societies were utilized to the repayment of shares. Those members who addressed us all agreed that the majority of them were making an effort to shake off the old debts to the money-lenders.

We were able to obtain a fair idea of the position of the Sonepet Co-operative Union. The Union owned the building where the Bank was situated. The credit of the Union was well established, and we were told that even money-lenders were beginning to send in deposits. The rate of interest for fixed deposits varied from 6 to 7 per cent. The secret of the popularity of the Union among their depositors in the neighbourhood was perhaps due to the fact that Government Bonds valued at Rs. 40,000 (£3,000) had been deposited by the Union at the Imperial Bank. The deposits from non-members exceeded Rs. 2 lakhs (£15,000), while from the members the figure then was Rs. 22,000 (£1,650). There were 158 shareholders of the Union, and they all represented societies affiliated to the Union, as individual members were not allowed to hold shares. The statement of profits showed a progressive increase from year to year. For instance, in 1921 the profit was slightly over Rs. 500 (£37 10s.), while in 1926 it exceeded Rs. 5,000 (£375). The management

of this Union was vested in a committee of twelve directors who were elected from representatives of affiliated societies. The term of office of the directors was for three years. The committee was under Government supervision which was considered to have contributed towards the stability of the Union.

But when one of the directors was asked to whom the Union or its affiliated societies belonged, the reply came that they belonged to the *Sircar* (Government). We were highly amused at the reply. Here lies the inevitable danger of the Co-operative Movement being entirely manned by the State. As I write, I cannot help thinking of the remarks of an Irish patriot, which are something like this :

> ' When a man becomes imbecile, his friends place him in an asylum. When people grow decadent and imbecile, they place themselves entirely in the hands of a whole army of officials, without whose assistance they cannot move and have their existence.'

The Co-operative Movement in India, in order to achieve its purpose, needs the first essential element—education. So long as the members are insufficiently educated, societies will remain as ' creches '.

We visited the Land Mortgage Bank which had recently been established chiefly with the object of affording facilities for the redemption of land mortgages. Loans were given on the security of two sureties, and the mortgage of the whole of the borrower's land, which was valued by two directors ; but the final sanction of the loan depended on the opinion of the Sub-Inspector. The maximum loan admissible was 50 per cent of the value of the land mortgage. We were told that the membership of this Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank was increasing.

The Co-operative Commission Shop began its business in 1924. Although the Shop was still in its early stages, the total turnover for the present year was estimated at 56,000 maunds of produce valued at Rs. 2,75,000

(£20,625). The chief advantage the members of the Commission Shop got was correct weighment and comparative freedom from malpractices. There was, of course, a certain reduction in charges which was much appreciated by the members, although the difference between charges by the Commission Shop and other shops in the *Mandi* (grain market) was rather small. The Commission was charged on buyers and not on sellers. The management of the Shop was vested in a Board of Directors, annually elected from amongst the shareholders. The Shop dealt in all kinds of produce, such as wheat, gram, cotton, gur, etc., and the mode of business may be best described as follows :

Soon after the sellers brought their carts within the compound of the *Mandi*, open biddings were commenced in the presence of a representative of the Shop. The highest bidder was then made to pay the price in cash within five days of purchase, but the produce was immediately passed on to the seller. There was one point which interested me very much and which I should like to mention here. Since 1925, the Department of Agriculture had entrusted the Commission Shop with the agency for the sale of Departmental seeds. One of the members of the Shop told me that this arrangement was advantageous to the cultivators. The Shop had already sold 66 bags of the improved Punjab wheat,[1] and 20 bags of improved cotton seed. But I was not particularly happy about the manner in which the seeds were stored. A great deal of improvement has to be made in developing means and methods of marketing agricultural produce. In the evolution of organized marketing, the Co-operative Commission Shop could play an important role. There were nineteen such Shops in the Province and in 1927-8 they sold produce to the value of Rs. 21 lakhs (£157,500). The chief difficulty, however, was a chain of middlemen

[1] Known as ' Punjab 8A '.

dominating the market centres, a chain which became well forged when the unscrupulous money-lender added his strength to it.

31

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Nagpur (C.P.)
(1927)

To a colleague in the University of Calcutta.

This morning we visited the Nagpur Municipal Cotton Market. It is well organized; the regular buyers in the market are registered and brokers and weighmen are allowed to practise in the market only under licences. The sale begins by the declaration of the maximum price which the registered buyers are prepared to pay for the best quality of cotton. How they arrive at this maximum price I could not say. The business between the agents of the various firms and the sellers is carried through licensed brokers. The brokerage usually is 8 annas a cart; but the scale of fees or rates are determined by the Market Committee. As regards weighment the market prescribed that a maund would mean 28 lb. of unginned cotton (*kapas*) or ginned cotton (*rui*). A *Bhoja* was 292 lb. of ginned cotton and a *Khandi* 784 lb. of unginned cotton. No weights or measures other than those that are prescribed are recognized in disputes.

The Committee maintains a weighing machine and those who want to have their cotton weighed on that are required to pay a fee of 1 anna per cart of cotton. To avoid all sources of disputes, the by-laws of the Market Committee provide for granting a receipt for each sale transaction.

We arrived at the market place at about 8.30 a.m. by which time a number of cultivators had already arrived with cartloads of cotton. So we had an opportunity of asking them a few questions on their experience in marketing cotton. But I felt that these cultivators

were not telling us the true story and that they were afraid of the brokers and others with whom they had to deal.

The cultivators' interests are not represented on the Committee—a fatal drawback of the organization. The hard truth was driven home to our minds in our investigation of the problem of marketing agricultural produce in India (whether it be cotton or any other produce) that there was the most urgent necessity for the creation of producers' exchanges in convenient centres of production, where the producers' interests would be amply safeguarded. The highly developed consumers' market for cotton in Bombay and outside has spread itself out in the country through its commission agents and brokers, each additional link among whom is a nail driven into the coffin of the cultivator. What, therefore, is required in the interests of the producer is that, when the consumers' market thus comes to his doors, he must be in a position to meet the consumer on equal terms and demand from him the settlement of a price for his commodities on the basis of the ruling price in the chief consumers' market. This requires organized selling among the producers, and selling of better commodities through inspection, grading and standardization. All these are possible only in an organized place like the producers' exchange in which through State intervention and legislation, the producer may be enabled to reap all advantages of open, honest and fair dealing on the part of the consumers, and all the benefits of grading and standardization of commodities, and storing of goods for favourable seasons. In this respect the Indian Central Cotton Committee has not been able to do much ; no doubt it has established sub-committees in various belts of cotton produce ; but, except in Berar and in Bombay, there is no law operating for the institution of producers' exchanges for the construction and management of warehouses in those exchanges, and for the standardizing of commodities. Here again

the Government and legislatures are waiting to hear the voice of the voiceless; but the time is fast approaching when they will.

In this province, *Malguzars* are the intermediaries between the cultivator and the Government. The *malguzari* system was an invention by Raja Toder Mal, and it is still retained by the British Government. One of the subsidiary occupations of the *Malguzars* is to advance grain for subsistence and for seed to the cultivator on the condition that it is paid back at the harvest with 25 per cent interest (*sowai*).

32

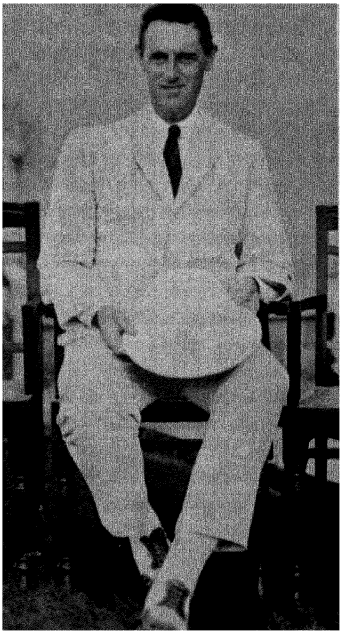
Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Nagpur
(1927)

To a Bengal politician.

. . . My mind is gradually emerging out of this cult of democracy and liberalism through the application of which you propose to rehabilitate Indian rural life! No, this colossal task requires *action*; immediate and insistent; action not dependent upon votes or vetoes. How long must the rural masses wait before measures are passed by your legislatures for remedying this or that social and economic evils? Try and convince me that by some constitutional changes you will successfully arrest the disintegrative forces that are at work in our village life and institutions. My host is a liberal politician and has a pathetic faith in democracy, but what he means by it has not been made clear to me. K—'s ideal is Adult Franchise, and if this is attained, we shall make a rapid progress in agriculture, rural education, rural industries, and so on. What an easy solution!

All this is a digression. I must now give replies to your queries in regard to agricultural credit. Perhaps a bare description of what we, three members of the

AKOLA COTTON MARKET



LORD LINLITHGOW IN BOMBAY, 1926

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Commission, saw in Akola might be of some interest to you.

Akola, as you know, is the centre of a large cotton tract. Here we visited a Central Co-operative Bank which has been in existence since 1917. The main portion of the deposits comes from non-members, which proves that the Bank has established confidence among the people. Money is advanced to the societies on the issue of a pronote by the society.

The officials and the managing committee of the Bank explained to us the Land Mortgage Debenture Scheme which was adopted by the Bank about nine years ago. The capital for that scheme was raised by the Provincial Bank; but the Central Bank issued debentures. The period of repayment under that scheme was fixed at a sixteen years period, and the rate of sinking fund was 6¼ per cent with interest 9 per cent, making a total of 15¼ per cent. Most of the people who took advantage of the scheme obtained the loans for the purposes of clearing all their old debts. But unfortunately many of them could not pay their instalments to the Bank regularly and had to borrow again from the Co-operative Societies or even from outside. It was held that the sinking fund rate was rather heavy, but it might be reduced if the period could be lengthened. We understood that the Bank authorities contemplated such changes as stated above. The Bank had a small staff for the purposes of investigations as regards encumbrances and the title to the lands. Not more than 50 per cent of the value of the land, as assessed by a special committee appointed by the Bank, is given as loan.

Coming to the activities of the Bank other than those in relation to the land mortgage scheme, the Central Bank lends to the societies affiliated to it. We were informed that out of about 2,000 members more than 15 per cent who have dealings with the Bank own holdings of more than 15 acres. Thus it showed that

the Bank was really meant chiefly for the small cultivator.

The Bank is situated in a small well-constructed building of its own. The staff consists of one Manager, two accountants and three clerks. I was particularly interested in the department of Savings Bank which had been recently opened. This arrangement helped to promote thrift among the members. There was no dearth of money in the Bank and it was assisted by the Provincial Bank at Nagpur whenever such assistance was found to be necessary, and the fact of placing with the Imperial Bank Government Paper to the value of about Rs. 2,10,000 (£15,750) gave the Bank the advantage of securing advances from the Imperial Bank.

The Central Bank was also attempting to organize the sale of agricultural produce belonging to the members. But this activity of the Bank has not made much progress, and my own suggestion is that the Bank should not launch into such enterprises. Let Co-operative Societies be formed for this purpose.

By the way, I have not as yet received that note which is supposed to contain all the relevant facts regarding co-operative jute sale societies. Without proper organization, the jute growers cannot reap the benefit of the world-wide demand for jute; and yet, the initiative of organizing these Societies is conspicuously absent. The amazing truth is that even the co-operative organizers are not loyal to the co-operative ideals.

33

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Lyallpur (Punjab)
(1927)

From my Journal.

This morning we visited the Co-operative Commission Shop and the *Mandi*. The enormous grain market in a tract which was a desert only a few years ago! The

Mandi is designed to market the produce from an area about 2½ million acres. Wheat, jowar, lentils and other grains are stacked on a wide brick pavement in front of the row of shops. There is no accommodation for long time storage, nor is there any necessity for bulk storage. Practically all grain is sold out in the market during the season.

The character of farming in the Canal Colony can be, to a certain extent, judged from a marketing place such as the Lyallpur *mandi*. In contrast to a greater part of India, the type of agriculture in the Canal Colonies is fast emerging out of the stage of subsistence farming. The influence of world commerce is conspicuously shaping the agricultural economics in this region. The Co-operative Commission shop was started about eight years back, chiefly by the members of the Co-operative Credit Society. Perhaps the increased margin of profit which was reaped by middlemen during the war period induced the members to organize themselves co-operatively. Within a period of eight years 115 individuals and 50 societies have joined the membership of the Commission Shop. Members have greatly benefited through this organization, and the figures supplied to us show that the business done by this Commission Shop is steadily increasing.

It was pointed out to us that, in the absence of the Co-operative Commission Shop, the total sale since the beginning of the organization, of about 4,00,000 maunds (14,650 tons) of produce would have been sold through the middlemen *cum* Sowcars who reap usually abundant harvest from the unorganized cultivators. If one calculates the profit these middlemen earn per maund of cotton or toria or wheat, then the saving under this head alone to those who are organized in this Commission Shop can be calculated at over Rs. 2,82,000 (£21,000). Then, of course, the advantage of fair dealing in regard to weighments, grading, etc., are some of the great advantages of a Co-operative Sale Society.

The success of this venture certainly lies in the efficient management by a board consisting of fifteen well-known citizens of the Lyallpur Canal Colony. The entire staff of the Commission Shop consists of a manager, a *munim* and a cashier. The merit of the co-operative organization in the sphere of marketing agricultural produce is quite obvious, especially in such a centre where the distributing factor arising out of world prices operates as it does in this granary of India.

The Market Square of Lyallpur is indeed a sight; the noon-day bustle had begun; the sweetmeat vendors were beginning to carry on a brisk trade; the buyers and sellers of goods were crowding the shops, and some of them had assembled in the space beneath the clock tower. Our car made its way through the motley crowd of the Lyallpur Colonists. Such a sight as we saw, such details as we were able to gather, all confirmed that the cultivators in the district round about Lyallpur had been greatly benefited by progressive agriculture and organized marketing. Indeed ' the plough that is twin to the sword is the founder of cities '.

34

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Mahabaleswar
(1928)

To a colleague in the University of Calcutta.

The points raised in your note are covered by the evidence we have collected on this important, but not too easy, question of marketing organizations for protecting the interests of the primary producers. It is surprising that the jute markets in Bengal have continued so long in their present condition. From what I was able to ascertain about the Co-operative Jute Sale Societies, I might safely predict their failure.

You asked me about the marketing systems that exist in the cotton tract. I have not as yet studied them in any great detail but here is an extract from my journal from which you may get just an idea of how organized cotton markets work.

The Akola cotton market is one of the organized markets of Berar, and the system followed here is considered by the Indian Central Cotton Committee to be satisfactory. The market is managed by a special committee in which the cotton growers are not represented.

We were met by the market authorities who were kind enough to explain to us the various details involved in the process of marketing. A large number of carts loaded with cotton were crowding into the open space of the market and every seller was anxiously waiting for the declaration of the market price of the day which depended on the Bombay prices. In the meantime all the buyers had met and soon after the telegraphic message indicating the prices in Bombay was delivered they fixed the price among themselves by a curious method of making signs under a cloth, which are communicated round the ring of the brokers squatting on the well carpeted floor of a room. Having come to an agreement among themselves as to the price which they would be prepared to pay, it is announced in the open market and then bidding begins. We were highly amused at the proceedings of the buyers. Before the actual bidding commenced the Chairman of the Market Committee brought before us a cotton grower who gave us some information about the market through an interpreter. He gave us an account of his knowledge of the market and explained to us some of the outstanding advantages of regulated markets. We were informed that the price for raw unginned cotton (*kapas*) was reckoned at one-third that of ginned cotton, and that the principal complaint among cotton growers was that the rate

paid by the buyers at the time of settlement was not the rate fixed at the time of making the bargain and in many instances the sellers were harassed by disputes with regard to weighments. Such disputes often compelled the cultivator to accept a lower rate than that originally bargained for. It is also a well-known complaint that the buyers often made unauthorized deductions of various kinds from the weight of *kapas*. A man we questioned had brought his cotton from a distance of seven miles, and had 8 acres under cotton ; the day we met him he had brought 9 *candies* (nearly 7 tons) for sale. He confessed that it was not always to his advantage to sell cotton to the *Adatyas* (brokers) and therefore he had decided to sell his cotton to the co-operative shop of which he was now one of the shareholders.

In the office of the Market Committee we obtained some information about market fees, the existing method of controlling brokers and weighmen and collection of various charges including charity cesses. The complaints against weighments seemed to be widespread among the cotton growers and I felt convinced that under the existing system of weighment, the illiterate cultivator may easily be deprived of fair treatment In a regulated market the special up-to-date arrangements for weighment and closer supervision should have been provided for. The present arrangement of inspection was not satisfactory. As the weighmen were engaged by *Adatyas*, their report could not always be relied upon.

Another reasonable grievance was that the cotton growers were not represented on the Market Committee which consisted of five members nominated by the municipality and three elected by *Adatyas* on behalf of the cultivators. But the cultivators wanted direct representation.

We had very interesting evidence from a number of *Adatyas* and obtained from them an idea of various

malpractices resorted to by the cotton growers. The question of damping cotton arose and the brokers said that important firms such as Ralli Brothers did not add water to the ginned cotton before baling. As regards the price the cultivator received in the market, I have already described how the rate was fixed under a cloth by the ' ring ' of buyers. This rate often varies in the compound of the ginnery. Before concluding our conversation with these men, a number of growers once again reiterated the inequities from which they all suffered in the compounds of the ginning factories. As I listened to their grievances against the market and against the subordinates of the ginning factories, I said to myself that the fundamental reforms should come from the cultivator himself, i e. until he was literate he would not succeed in getting all the advantages of organized markets ; nor would the markets succeed in controlling adulteration and other malpractices of which we heard so much in the course of our inquiry.

35

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Mahabaleswar
(1928)

To a friend in Illinois, U.S.A.

. . . I like your comparison of the enquiry undertaken by the Agricultural Commission with that of the Country-life Commission appointed by President Roosevelt. But there is this difference—our Report, after it is submitted to His Majesty's Government, must become a public document. I often wonder why President Roosevelt did not allow the publication of the Report of the Country-life Commission. . . .

You ask me a very difficult question to which I can answer only by making a few extracts from a recent book on Indian Economics—*Wealth and Taxable*

Capacity of India, by Professors Shah and Khambatta. Personally I do not think that it is possible to make a correct estimate of the average income per head of our population per annum. I distrust ' the average ' ! In 1871, one Indian statesman (Dadabhai Naoroji) gave Rs. 20 (£1 10s.) ; in 1882 Baring-Barbour's estimate showed Rs. 27 (£2) ; in 1901 Lord Curzon's figure was Rs. 30 (£2 5s.). Shah and Khambatta found Rs. 36 (£2 14s.) for the period of 1900-14 ; and Rs. 58·5 (£4 7s. 9d.) for the period 1914-22.

But on the basis of the price-levels (taking the level in 1873 as 100) respectively these figures show a considerable reduction. Here is the table that shows the position :

		Absolute Figure	Index	Reduced Figure
Dadabhai Naoroji	1871	20	100	20
Baring-Barbour	1882	27	120	22·5
Lord Curzon	1901	30	139	21·6
Shah and Khambatta	1900–14	36	151	23·8
Shah and Khambatta	1914–22	58·5	231	25·3

Please do not swear by these figures. What can be concluded from this is that the economic position of our people is appallingly low, and that the rate of progress in the direction of raising the standard is extremely slow.[1]

But what is the good of all these statistics ? The great incomes of the rich in India are included in these calculations. The conditions of the life of the bulk

[1] The Indian Statutory Commission (Report, Vol. 1), which reported in 1930 observe :

' Even if the most optimistic (estimate) is adopted, the result is that the average income per head in India in 1922 was equivalent, at the prevailing rate of exchange, to less than £8, while the corresponding figure for Great Britain was £98.'

of the population are a positive proof of their extreme poverty, notwithstanding irrigation, railways, co-operative departments, and agricultural research, poverty endures. Our rural population suffers not only from abject poverty, but also from degrading superstitions and unhealthy traditional customs. Oh, this burden of tradition! Sometimes I feel inclined to believe that most of the ills of this country can be ascribed to crass ignorance and illiteracy.

As I move about among this C3 population, I lose the last remnant of my faith in those luminous ideals of democratic government for India. To you Americans, this may sound extremely reactionary; but the structure of our life is patriarchal, and village government has prepared the mind of the people to patriarchal conceptions of state. To our primitive minds the monarchical idea has a peculiar kind of fascination. The trouble is, our King is too far away from his Indian subjects; and we have no Mussolini.

36

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Mahabaleswar
(1928)

To a colleague in the University of Calcutta.

I was delighted to receive your letter containing a number of suggestions in regard to betterment of rural conditions. The possibilities of collective farming in India as an effective check on the fragmentation of the agricultural holdings seems to me to be remote. It would involve rather a revolutionary change in land laws and proprietary rights; but I agree that we cannot effectively build a twentieth century economic structure upon our sixteenth century land system. The first necessity, is to simplify the system of land tenures in Bengal, which, as you know, have given rise to serious complications in regard to ownership of land. Most

of the Bengal tenants are defenceless against the coalition of 'revenue farmers' and their officials. The legislative measures for modifying the Permanent Settlement of Bengal have proved to be inadequate. Our present-day economic and social chaos is mainly a heritage of which the burden has become oppressive. And the sooner we get rid of it the better for all concerned! The terms of reference of the Commission do not include the land question—it involves so many complicated problems that it would justify the appointment of another commission.

Not till I read carefully the Settlement Reports of some of our Bengal districts did I realize that the extreme and increasing sub-division of the land and scattered character of the holdings had become such a serious impediment to rural economic life. In view of smallness of holdings, all efforts to adopt methods for agricultural progress seem vain. Just ponder over the following table:

Districts	Average size of holding (in acres)	Average area per head of a cultivator's family[1] (in acres)
Midnapore	1·29	0·26
Faridpur	1·39	0·28
Jessore	1·50	0·30
Dacca	1·58	0·31
Noakhali	2·30	0·46
Backerganj ..	2·51	0·50
Mymensingh ..	2·67	0·53
Rajshahi	3·50	0·70

The average area of cultivable land per 100 cultivators is, according to the census of 1921, about 312 acres.

[1] Based on the assumption that the family consists of *five* members.

Let us accept the late Mr. Jack's assumption that the average size of a cultivator's family is five persons. Then the average area per head of a cultivator's family works out at about ·65 acres in Bengal.

But this figure is too high for most of the districts referred to above. Still the population grows—almost an insoluble problem this !

No magician can feed and clothe a family of five on the income from this average holding ; then there are two or three indispensable items of expenditure, namely (1) interest on debt, (2) rent, (3) social and religious obligations. I wish you could persuade half a dozen of your pupils to work out a number of typical family budgets of the Bengal peasantry. A very useful piece of practical work for your students.

The drafting of our Report is proceeding well. . . . The need for increased and well co-ordinated agricultural research is recognized by most of our witnesses and we agree. But no agricultural improvement of any consequence would be possible without having increased the size of holdings and also consolidating them.

However, your ' best wishes ' for making effective recommendations remind me of the story of a Chinese Emperor who once asked his ministers to account for the misery of the people. The ministers appointed a number of experts who presented the Emperor with sixty different answers ! Our ' answers ', however, would probably be unanimous, but they might be well over six hundred ; and I often wonder if the Governments, Central and Provincial, would *really* accept even six ! On the publication of our report the Government secretaries would draft resolutions of approval and express either pious hopes for future action or sincere regrets for not being able to implement our recommendations for ' lack of funds '. So there you are.

37

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Mahabaleswar
(1928)

To a British Statesman.

Our investigations are now over and within a month's time the Report will be available to you. Here you will find a broad analysis of the economic structure that supports India's basic industry and her millions. Of course we could not go into the question of land tenure systems, but these will have to be carefully scrutinized by the Government at a later date.

The experience I have gained during these months of investigation has deepened my conviction that the key and the clue to the future of this vast sub-continent have to be found in understanding the problems of the Indian masses. The village is a microcosm of the Indian Empire and rural India is *real* India. And yet economic backwardness of the people and medievalism manifested in their outlook and social organization are some of the conspicuous features of rural India. Men, women, children and domestic animals all give you an impression that they live beyond the pale of modern civilization. As I glance through the statistics of the percentage of illiteracy among the rural population, or read the evidence of medical authorities that the bulk of the people suffers from malnutrition, or study accounts of social customs and religious rituals, I wonder if mere changes in the machinery of constitutional apparatus would undermine the forces that obstruct social progress. So long as the disease of ignorance and superstition remains prevalent, you cannot prescribe any effective political specific. I believe that there can be no democratic State or Government on the foundation of a society which is undemocratic. Our politicians should be reminded of Lord Morley's definition of

democracy. That great statesman observed that ' democracy is the name for a certain general condition of society, having historic origins, springing from circumstances and the nature of things, not only involving the political doctrine of popular sovereignty but representing a cognate group of corresponding tendencies over the whole field of moral, social and even spiritual life within the democratic community.'

Our essential task is to rehabilitate and modernize the rural communities of India. The first step towards the fulfilment of this task is to remove some of the fatal deficiencies in the economic life of the people. What these deficiencies are you will find in the Report of the Commission. Only by an organized crusade against this ugly social and economic situation we may find for India a place in the comity of nations. And for that crusade we need a strong Government determined to execute concrete programmes of rural betterment, and we need an awakened public opinion fully conscious of fundamental social reforms.

38

Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1931)

To the Editor, *The Englishman.*[1]

The time has now approached when Great Britain has to decide whether India is to be ruled by force, or by the united will, consent, and co-operation of the Indian Nation, because by the time these lines see the light of publicity, the Congress at Karachi may have arrived at a decision shattering into pieces the very last hope which the country has gradually begun to entertain since the signing of the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement. From what is easily discernible in the existing circumstances, the Congress will probably either ratify the Agreement with a condition demanding

[1] *The Englishman*, 30th March 1931.

a Viceregal declaration about the reality or unreality of the 'safeguards' or will refuse to ratify it as a challenge to the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. The ultimate result will be the same either way: non-participation of the Congress at the forthcoming Round Table Conference, or participation with a view to wreck it on the question of the safeguards.

So long as British statesmen, of whichever party they may be, intend that safeguards should find a place in whatever Constitution may be granted, Mr. Gandhi's insistence on a reconsideration of the safeguards promises only an ugly manifestation of the unseemly and truculent temper characteristic of an Indian political meeting, and not a whit of the constitutional and material advancement of India.

The congressman asks, and asks with an apparent air of reasonableness, why it has been already taken for granted that the safeguards considered at the last Round Table Conference are real and definite, when the Conservative Leader has declared in the House of Commons, that Great Britain is so far uncommitted in respect of any constitution that may be granted to India. The congressman, therefore, insists that a non-committal attitude must be maintained in respect of the safeguards also, inasmuch as the safeguards to be introduced in a constitution cannot be thought of as real and definite when the constitution itself is only a castle in the air. The long and short of the whole affair seems to me to be an inveterate disinclination to arrive at an amicable settlement of the fundamental issues.

It will, therefore, be only a question of months at the latest before the congress decides upon the old game of civil disobedience. When revived, the civil disobedience movement cannot be expected to be of a nature which it once assumed under the leadership of Mr. Gandhi. Sardar Vallabhai Patel, the hero of Bardoli, is the dictator of the Congress in 1931,

and the game in which he is an adept and the manner in which he plays it are such that Government will find it difficult to control it with ordinances and measures of repression. The clarion call of the Congress under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhai Patel would appeal to those very sentiments which constitute the one great argument of the Indian farmer against the continuance of the present system of administration. The farmer knows not the manner in which the various items of indirect taxation are imposed by the Government; he comes into direct touch with the Government only in respect of land revenue. The manner in which land revenue is assessed, collected, or increased has been based on so much arbitrary economic data that it has long ago begun to be felt as one of the worst elements of unpopularity for the Government.

This long standing grievance against the Government has been very much intensified at the present time on account of the maximum degree of assessment having been reached, and the country is seething today with such a deep spirit of agrarian discontent that it requires only a touch of sympathy on the part of anyone to inflame it. We have already the signs of it in the United Provinces, although it is only in the form of discontent between the landlords and the tenants; but with the approach of the Congress régime of Sardar Vallabhai Patel, we may, without any hesitation, expect a general outburst of agrarian discontent in the country on the basis of land revenue, which would be a difficult thing for the Government to counteract.

The only course which I can think of as open to the Government is to relieve rural India by a reform of the system of land revenue, and to enlist its sympathy and co-operation on the side of the Government before Sardar Vallabhai Patel can embark upon his propagandist agitation on behalf of the Congress. Administrations in India have come and gone; but the land

revenue system, coming down to us from the time of Raja Toder Mal, has gone on for ever, with only such changes in its policy as were required for a substantial increase of the revenue. The land revenue system in India requires a thorough overhauling for the following reasons :

It is pre-eminently an inelastic source of income, while it has been handed over to the provinces for meeting the expenditure on nation-building departments.

Its incidence in general is high, and exceedingly high on the poor masses, as it imposes a uniform flat rate on the poor as well as on the rich.

It still retains most of the characteristics of the antidiluvian administration which preceded the advent of the British rule in India.

It has never been the subject of a thorough enquiry since the transference of India to the British Crown.

It will be an invidious inheritance for a self-governing India of the near future.

India is almost the only country in the world which collects land revenue on the basis on which it is collected here.

These, and several others, are reasons for a revision of the system of land revenue in India ; but the outstanding reason of them all is the fact that at a time like this, when the sky is deeply overclouded and every prospect of peace is gradually disappearing from the horizon, the Government should be conserving every resource available in the country to fight the forces of disorder and discontent.

39

Ballygunj,
Calcutta
(1931)

To a British Statesman.

The Reports of the Banking Enquiry Committees, Central and Provincial, are now available to us. They

reveal in details the conditions of rural indebtedness which were indicated by the Agricultural Commission. It is estimated that the total agricultural indebtedness of British India (including Burma) amounts to Rs. 900 crores (£675 millions). The borrowing itself is not, under normal conditions, a serious problem; it assumes seriousness when it is incurred for unproductive purposes (e.g. current expenses, till the crops are harvested, social and religious ceremonies, litigation, etc.). Then, usury is a powerful factor in the ever increasing indebtedness of our rural folks; and I am convinced that so long as this menace remains unchecked, it will certainly continue to undermine the foundations of Indian agricultural economy. Here is a table showing the extent of indebtedness of our peasantry in eight provinces of British India.

Province	Total indebtedness		Average indebtedness per agriculturist	Average indebtedness per acre of cultivated land
	Rs. crores	£ millions	Rs.	Rs.
Assam ..	22	16½	31	37
Bengal ..	100	75	31	43
Bihar and Orissa ..	155	116¼	31	63
Bombay ..	81	60¾	49	25
The Central Provinces	36	27	30	14
Madras ..	150	112½	50	44
The Punjab ..	135	101¼	92	50
The United Provinces ..	124	93	36	36

But the poverty and indebtedness of the tillers of the soil are not peculiar to India; they exist elsewhere. What has become serious in India is the vicious circle

in which the bulk of her peasantry are born, live and die. So long as they remain in this depressing state, it is difficult to arrest the progressive decadence of rural life. Writing about the co-operative movement in India, a distinguished continental author has remarked that ' the country is in the grip of the Mahajan. It is the bonds of debt that shackle agriculture '.

You will, however, understand that the growth of indebtedness does not necessarily mean increased poverty. I should like to see the loads of ancestral debt taken off from the ryot's shoulders, and I would like to put some effective restraints upon the *Mahajan* and his system of money-lending, since he cannot as yet be replaced by co-operative credit. What are those restrictions going to be and how efficiently can they be enforced are the questions to which the Central and Provincial Governments must now engage their close attention. And under the conditions obtaining in India the Central Government cannot absolve themselves of taking initiative in this matter. I hope the interpretation of the phrase ' provincial autonomy ' will not stand in the way of direction and guidance as should be obtained from the Central (Federal ?) Government. When I speak of a strong Central Government for India along with the grant of provincial autonomy, I mean that Indian Provinces cannot really be autonomous by the stroke of a pen and that the Central Government must provide for co-ordinating bodies in matters affecting the whole of India.

Chapter III

SOCIAL LIFE, EDUCATION AND HEALTH IN RURAL INDIA

40

Shelida,
Bengal
(1912)

To a friend in England.

Two weeks ago I was in Santiniketan and was able to attend the ceremonies in connexion with the anniversary of Maharsi Debendranath Tagore's initiation. In accordance with the traditional methods of Indian festivities, a country fair (*mela*) was organized in the open fields surrounding the *ashram*. The *mela* is an indigenous institution which takes the place of rural and agricultural exhibitions in the European countries.

As I walked among the large crowd of village folks who came here from the distant parts of the district and visited the quaint little stalls where the country traders had displayed their wares, I realized that this institution could be so organized as to offer a powerful stimulus to rural advancement. It has already a distinct place in Indian rural life ; but only when it would attract our social service workers as a potential educational agency of considerable significance, could its real functions be fulfilled.

All human relationships are, in a sense, social, and in a country where wide divergent social strata exist, there is a special need for encouraging the social features of the *mela*. Revival of indigenous games, of art and music would certainly make the *mela* a

live institution. As it is, the quasi-dramatic performances (*jatra*), based on Indian epics, do attract thousands of rural folks. Without these performances, *melas* are never successful.

With the aid of a bioscope, or 'magic lantern', an interesting series of lectures might be arranged—somewhat on the lines of adult education associations in England. Here at a *mela* a number of village leaders might come together and discuss the matters of common interest to them; here they might formulate plans for better marketing facilities and for developing social intercourse among them.

But, in order to achieve all this, the organization should be in touch with the educated men belonging to the villages, living in or outside. Most of our village institutions have fallen into such a state that their revival or rehabilitation is impossible without the aid of those whose presence in rural areas would perhaps have resisted the forces of their disintegration. The *mela* may well be a meeting ground of rural and urban folk and of social workers. I believe in every district there should be formed a 'Village Fair Association' under the direction of the District Board. Such an association might form a link with the educated class. Would the Government relish such an idea? I wonder.

41

Shelida
(1912)

To a Professor of the University of Illinois, U.S.A.

. . . A year ago I was in Allahabad to see the exhibition, the object being to get an idea of agricultural progress so far achieved under the patronage of the Government. The objects of the exhibition were explained on the opening day in the address given by Mr. Justice Richards. He said:

'Encouraged to meet in a spirit of generous emulation, East and West now display before agriculturist and manufacturer, before producer and consumer, before all classes in one small cosmos what eastern experience, hoary with the wisdom of centuries can suggest, what western science rejoicing in the energy of highly trained brains can evolve, and the golden heights to which the combination of these two forces can elevate mankind. . . .'

'The Agricultural Court' was so organized that some of the agricultural appliances could be conveniently demonstrated before the spectator. For instance, in the centre of the court there was a pond with water-lifts and irrigation pumps of all kinds, and also a number of plots in immediate proximity were so arranged that the actual area of land irrigated by these appliances might be ascertained. There were a few instructive models of irrigational engineering devices used in the provinces. Then we saw all important varieties of cereals and other principal crops grown in British India. You will have noticed their quality from the samples I am sending you. On enquiry I learnt that the cotton crop was not profitable to the grower, the reasons being (*a*) poor yield per acre, (*b*) inadequate and inefficient facilities for ginning, (*c*) lack of proper utilization of cotton seed. But, cotton has a great future in India—just imagine the possibilities of supplying cotton piece-goods to the three hundred millions of India's population.

In the Entomological section exhibited by the Imperial Research Institute (Pusa) there were a few specimens of Indian crop pests and parasites. Sugar-cane borers, cotton leaf-rollers, mustard sawflies, timber and fungus parasites and a collection of butterflies and moths—all these were arranged in somewhat the same fashion as that adopted in your museums. But, nothing much about the control of these pests is yet known and researches in this direction have not been seriously undertaken in India.

Tagore[1] was very keen on Indian dairy problems and tried to get some idea of recent developments in dairy research in India. But there again almost nothing has been done so far by the trustees of the people of India. Indeed the 'Model Dairy' of this exhibition would have shocked your freshmen in the agricultural college.

There is not much enthusiasm among the public here over this exhibition. The fact that the *real* cultivating classes were conspicuous by their absence set one thinking whether such exhibitions in our present circumstances benefited the primary producers and artisans or whether they were organized for the advertisement of foreign exhibits which were so well represented in this show. I wonder. I may quote here a communication that appeared in *Capital*, a well-known commercial newspaper of Calcutta.

'I visited the Exhibition on Thursday. I found that special trains of cultivators organized by the Collector of Basti had come in the morning. There were numerous poor cultivators scattered about the grounds, some looking at machinery and some at the lamp-posts, but I met one who looked very melancholy and sat near the door of one of the buildings. I asked him why he did not mingle in the crowd and see the exhibits. He said he had left his mother dying in the village and wanted to return but the special would not go until two days after. I asked why he had come at all. He replied that he had not, but the *Tahsildar* of Khalilabad had sent him!'

'Probably most of the cultivators had the same story to tell, though they may not have been in the plight this man was. If the special had been organized at the time of the bathing fair, one month hence, much of the sting would have been removed. But the exhibition wants visitors urgently and a resourceful officialdom is at its back. They come, poor men, loaded in coal trucks! These poor cultivators have to pay the same entrance fee of As. 8 (9d) a day which rich men pay.'

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[1] A son of the Poet.

42

Shelida (Bengal)
(1913)

To a friend in England.

For over two years now I have been in touch with the rural areas of Bengal. We set out to improve agriculture because the traditional methods of cultivation cannot be continued without causing exhaustion of the soil. It is clear from our study of the problems that the productivity of the land has to be increased if we want to raise this submerged humanity to the level of normal human beings. Of course a modern nation cannot be entirely dependent on agriculture. But above all, the foremost need of rural Bengal is *Education* and the root-cause of all our troubles is illiteracy. You may try to introduce some new methods in cultivation, or suggest plans for better living by some forms of subsidiary industries, in every step you are up against this blind wall of ignorance and superstitions.

The progress of education in rural areas has been extremely slow although the pigeon-holes of the Departments of Education are packed with pious resolutions in regard to the need of this leaven in rural life. The officials however miss no opportunity to tell us that they are the trustees of India's millions. And yet they have not given much attention to Mr. Gokhale's Bill for the introduction of compulsory free primary education! Even the educated Indian plutocrats have not fully realized the urgency of this problem of rural education.

We are planning in Tagore's estate to set up a number of schools in each division. The proposals have been well received by village elders and there is a genuine enthusiasm in this matter. My chief difficulty is to get funds and really good teachers. I have not the heart to suggest even a small fee from the bulk of the peasantry—you have no idea of their desperate poverty.

Then there are some grave obstacles in making the school a real centre of the village—not so much the prevalence of social barriers of caste or religious antagonism, but this total absence of facilities for transport and communications makes it almost impossible to run a village school. From the account supplied to me by certain district board officers, I gather that regular attendance in school cannot be secured on account of periodic illness. Thus, there is a vicious circle. Until and unless this is broken, there is no hope for us. The village elders say that the primary need is the improvement of rural health. ' What is the good of teaching these children who are infected with malarial poison ', they declare in a spirit of despair.

43

Santiniketan (Bengal)
(1915)

To a social worker in India.

I have to leave this ' abode of Peace ' and set up a ' home ' in Ramgarh, near Nainital. As yet it is not possible for me to make any plan for my work there. At any rate I shall try to utilize my time as well as I can and study the conditions of the villagers in that district. I do hope you will continue to keep me informed about your work. You know how interested I am in that kind of expression of patriotism.

I feel sure that your work will be appreciated by the district board but even if you do not get a little pittance from its meagre funds, do not be discouraged. Rely on the *people*, on your illiterate comrades. Once you gain their confidence, they will stand by you. This I know from my own experience—this loyalty of the simple unsophisticated rural folk. Invite the village elders to use your school for holding meetings to settle small disputes; ask the officials such as

agricultural demonstrators or inspectors of the co-operative department to hold afternoon meetings in the school. Link up your school with various village ceremonies. For example, the village minstrels should be encouraged to give their recitals in your school compound; during festivities dramatic representations (*jatra*) may also be held there. In other words, every perceptible element of common life and purpose that still survives in the debris of our rural civilization must be utilized for building up your community centre. It is my firm conviction that unless and until the Indian rural community becomes a social unit, there can be no stability either in political expedients or in economic structure. There is, if you like, the nucleus of democracy. If we ignore this basic fact, we shall never succeed in the quest for a truly National Government.

44

Surul, Bengal
(1917)

To a school teacher.

. . . It is difficult to suggest a suitable curriculum for your school in which you propose to introduce a course of agricultural training. This phrase 'agriculture bias' has become a fashion since it has emerged from official files and despatches. In the Bombay Presidency one or two schools have recently been started with the object of testing this bias theory. Personally I do not see anything remarkable in such schemes. One may certainly improve the means and methods of teaching nature study which must be an integral part of the elementary school curriculum; but you cannot possibly offer agricultural education at a primary stage. What we must aim at is to develop a sound general education both in primary and secondary schools so that we may have a sound basis for technical education.

The same remark applies to your adult education proposals. It must begin with non-vocational courses of training, and after you have made some progress in this direction you may arrange in co-operation with the Government farm in your neighbourhood for specialized training in the principles of scientific agriculture. Our main difficulty is that the progress in general education in rural areas has been so slow and utterly inadequate. Not only do we need more generous provision for general education, but we require a wholly new attitude toward rural education. Where are the driving forces that this country needs for shaking the masses out of inertia and apathy ?

45

Behala, Bengal
(1921)

To a friend in the Y.M.C.A. (Calcutta).

There is no hope, I fear, of receiving a grant from the municipality here, and we have to rely on other resources. ——'s argument was that the village folks did not feel the need for educating their children, and that the money spent for primary education was wasted ! I nearly lost my temper but for the sake of the work in hand I controlled myself. My reply was that if the members of the Municipal Board cared to write to the Director of Public Instruction, they would find out that wherever educational facilities were offered to the masses, they availed themselves of them, and that the ' waste ' was largely due to the system of primary education.

I have no patience with those who only talk about the system being wasteful. We all realize that it is so ; but how, and by whom, are the existing defects to be rectified ? I suggested to the Chairman that a committee consisting of men selected by him should be appointed to advise him how improvements may be

effected in the schools under the municipality. He didn't seem to receive the suggestion with any visible signs of enthusiasm.

The more I come in contact with our local self-governing bodies, the more I am in despair of any success in the attainment of 'swaraj' through the assembly and councils.

It is recognized that the only fitting remedy for the backwardness of our people is a wide extension of primary and secondary education, and yet the apathy of the responsible men of the community towards this matter is indeed very striking. What is this due to? The essential groundwork of national development has yet to be completed before you may hope to build anything like a stable constitution for India.

So far the Government and the educated public have approached the problem of primary schools half-heartedly. In sixty-five years something like 84 per cent of the Negroes of the U.S.A. have reached literacy, within a period of forty years Japan was able to educate the bulk of its population—and just look at our figures! What hope is there of rural Bengal if we do not provide her with the leaven of education? The need is great, because it would increase a hundred-fold the productiveness of labour and also open out an avenue for real progress in overcoming this inertia. It is their illiteracy that makes them quite defenceless.

The extension of primary education, followed by a widespread movement of adult education and the provision of facilities for technical education would provide the essential groundwork of national development. I would refuse to tolerate any compromise here. If the problem is largely one of finance, well, the educated minority of the province must find the necessary funds for these purposes.

As regards the obligation of the Government, nothing will move that automaton until the force of public opinion is brought to bear on it. The

Department of Public Instruction has even forgotten our King-Emperor's Message in which His Majesty expressed a desire to see a network of schools so that, to quote his gracious words, ' the homes of my Indian subjects may be brightened and their labour sweetened by the spread of knowledge, with all that follows in its train, a higher level of thought, of comfort, of health '.

46

Behala
(1922)

To a European visitor.

Your visit to our *Karmi Sangha* (association) has been greatly appreciated by us, and the workers wish me to convey to you their sense of gratitude. We do not wish to be identified with the Congress ; for our main object is to test some of the principles of rural reconstruction, and to train a band of young men whose services may be required if some of our public-spirited men wish to organize rural welfare centres in Bengal.

We started the organization with the inauguration of a scheme to provide medical relief to the indigent villagers. I have explained the scheme to you but its success is to be measured not in terms of numbers of patients treated or the gallons of quinine mixture doled out. Through the working of the medical scheme, we aim at gaining the confidence of the people ; and once they realize that our workers are their sincere well-wishers, we shall go forward with our plans for rural education.

That our rural folk have no desire for education is wholly incorrect. ' Every large Hindu village possessed a school of its own and the foundation of a system of national education has, long previous to British rule, been laid by the spontaneous efforts of Hindu and Mohammedan Society ', wrote the authors of the Indian Education Commission Report (1880).

Even now there are instances where they taxed themselves for providing educational facilities to their children. Turning to the history of primary education in Bengal, we learn that when one Christian missionary, Mr. May, opened a *pathsala* in 1814 he had sixteen boys on the first day and in less than a year the number increased to 951.

Take the instance of English schools in Bengal: they were established by *private* efforts in the beginning of the nineteenth century. David Hare (a fine old Scotsman who was a watchmaker) and the famous Serampore missionaries started schools but they could not accommodate the increasing number who sought admission into them. You will be interested to know that Rabindranath Tagore's grandfather, Prince Dwarkanath, was a pupil in a school started by one Mr. Sherbourne, and when this noble Englishman became old and gave up his work Dwarkanath gave him a pension for life.

In 1835, the population of this province was about forty millions; and a survey made by the Administration of the East India Company showed that there were then as many as 100,000 schools in the province. That is, a village school for every 400 persons. About a century later, the population has increased by ten millions, but there are now only some 38,000 primary schools, and 2,500 secondary schools in the province.

But it is not so much the number of schools that matter; what concerns us is the *system* of education followed in training the future citizens of the Empire. I have before me an extract from an interesting report prepared about eighty years ago by an officer of the East India Company. Its author, Mr. Adam, says that the system of education then followed was 'the simplest, the safest, the most popular and the most effectual plan for giving that stimulus to the native mind which it needs . . '. He was strongly opposed to placing the educational system in the hands of an alien government whose duties should be to

endeavour to supply what was deficient in the system. This was also the expressed opinion of some of the distinguished British administrators who served India since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Sir Thomas Munro, who was Governor of Madras from 1820 to 1827, wrote:

> 'It is not my intention to recommend any interference whatever in the native schools Everything of this kind ought to be carefully avoided, and the people should be left to manage their schools in their own way All that we ought to do is to facilitate the operations of these schools by restoring any funds that have been diverted from them, and perhaps granting additional ones where it may appear advisable.'

All this is by the way. You are, I know, interested in our educational programme. I had not realized how difficult it was to organize courses for adult education; but we have made, I think, a good start. I am still begging 'from door to door' to raise a little fund for a 'magic lantern'.

Personally, I do not attach much importance, at this stage, to the Primary school scheme the village elders wish us to put through. No scheme would satisfactorily work without trained teachers. By teacher, I do not mean the type of *gurumahasya* you meet in the village *pathsalas*; our aim should be to train teachers of a kind who may occupy the position of community leaders. The teacher can make his school a real community centre, where all important functions of common interest to the village may be held; he would be associated with all activities, official and non-official, inaugurated for the village welfare. I do not see why he should not be an agent of the Agricultural Department for popularizing better seeds, better implements and suitable manures. Through him the so-called nation building department could carry on effective propaganda in rural areas and organize adult education. For all this, the first step must be the training of our future *gurus*.

But the difficulty is to attract young men to this task. Apart from the question of poor salary, they seem to me to be temperamentally unfit for remodelling the system of rural education somewhat on the lines I have indicated above. I am trying to persuade some of the villagers in this neighbourhood to allow us to train a selected number of adults whose services would be available to them if they start schools in their villages. It is my conviction that workers who have no *actual* stake in the village should be debarred from active participation in its responsibilities. That is why I do not encourage the Bengal Social Service League to co-operate with us. Our task is not to assume leadership of rural communities, but to recruit village youth in order to train them to become creative leaders.

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Behala, Bengal
(1922)

To a village Headman.

From what I have seen in your village, I think that the first and foremost task before you should be to clear those death-traps that exist in the village. I mean tanks, ponds and *dobas*. Excepting the large tank, each one is rich in all sorts of abominations, overhung with jungle and the surface covered with shiny pondweed. And these serve for washing, bathing and drinking!

In the first place you should prohibit the practice of casual excavations for obtaining earth for the construction of plinths round huts. Perhaps, you can allot an area from where the earth for this purpose may be obtained. Why not reclaim those silted-up tanks situated at the skirt of the village, the surplus earth of which may be used in filling up some of the *dobas*?

Secondly, no homestead should be permitted to have weeds and other kinds of useless vegetation. I have

suggested to your Zemindar to offer remission of a portion of rent to those who would keep their homestead free from undergrowths ; but you must bring pressure on him by organizing public opinion in favour of all these needs of your village.

Thirdly, you must construct one or two good roads. They are essential for the welfare of the village—beneficial to the cultivators and artisans, helpful to the progress of schools and indispensable for bringing village life in touch with the current of affairs. You must look upon roads as being as important to the village as arteries are to the human body and expenditure towards their construction as an investment. Good roads would widen the scope of social contacts, and I am sure their existence will tend to lure back those who have deserted the village.

I know that you have difficulties in obtaining necessary funds for road making, but I have great faith in co-operative efforts. For instance, if you could organize the labour force of the village for clearing tanks or making roads, the Zemindar may feel obliged to assist you. Besides the practice of utilizing idle months of the adult villagers for the benefit of the entire community has a great possibility. This would train you in self-help and also in the art of doing things co-operatively.

I shall certainly look forward to another visit to your village and trust you will then be able to show me what success you have in organizing village activities. (*Translated from the Bengalee.*)

48

Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1926)

To a friend in England.

I am grateful to you for sending me a brief résumé of adult education in Great Britain which has a special

nterest to me now. From the questionnaire issued by .he Agricultural Commission, you will notice that the problem of rural education is given due prominence. Organization and finance are the two essential requisites for the solution of this problem and I hope the minds of our public men will be turned to it in a manner warranted by the magnitude and gravity of the task. A friend of mine says that an organized system of primary education alone would need about 25 thousand teachers in Bengal which has nearly 85,000 villages. Just see what an outlet there exists for our educated middle-class youths who are swelling the rank of the unemployed and hence of the agitators.

I have made a special note of what you suggest in regard to a thorough analysis of Indian rural life in the Report of the Commission. The subject is indeed very comprehensive ; it touches nearly every aspect of the life of the masses and embraces the activities of almost all departments of the Government.

The causes of the decline of Indian rural life are numerous and the cumulative effects of these causes are now in evidence. Malaria is our most insidious enemy. You cannot measure its tyranny by the annual toll of death ; the greatest mischief lies in its power of undermining the vitality of our millions and thus impairing their efficiency in the economic life of the country. You will be surprised to know that in British India more than six millions die annually of preventable diseases !

Not long ago I went to Burdwan, where in 1908 my father became a victim to malarial fever. From the town I went to visit a number of villages just to see what havoc was being raged by malaria.

Now, Burdwan in the middle of the last century was a prosperous tract ; it gave Bengal some of her noblest sons, the memory of its prosperity still lingers among the older generation. But today it is in the grip of death. Hundreds of villages are abandoned ; agriculture

is on the decline and the population bears the mark of a 'dying race'. What could have happened to this district within such a short period to reduce it to a stage for the dance of Death? The answer is, Malaria.

A member of the District Board gave me the following figures of population from two typical villages.

	Before Malaria (1860)	After Malaria (1870)	Population today (1921)
Dwarbasini ..	2,743	784	350
Dhaniakhali ..	1,112	415	235

This is a terrible state of affairs. It is held by the public health authorities that the construction of railways and embankments created obstructions to the natural drainage system and produced favourable conditions for mosquito-breeding. Dr. Bentley, lately Director of Public Health, Bengal, says that 'the embanking of the country was marked by the simultaneous occurrence of appalling epidemics of malaria, . . . and the progressive depopulation of the affected areas. The occurrence of outbreaks of malaria in association with construction of embankments has never been disputed, and the observation in regard to the sudden increase of the spleen index in the neighbourhood of these embankments is conclusive.'

And yet to the early British administrators it appeared to be a necessity to protect the district against frequent recurrence of floods by the erection of what is known as the *Damodar Bund.* The embankment by itself could not have done so much damage, but the real mischief began with the opening of the railway lines in the construction of which sufficient care was not taken to maintain the natural drainage of the country.

What must now be done ? Malarial fever has taken such a hold here that it cannot be successfully combated by doling out quinine and sprinkling tanks with kerosene oil. This enormous problem demands radical steps, my friend. But here again Bengal is handicapped with an empty exchequer. Our total annual expenditure for Public Health does not exceed 40 lakhs (£300,000). Bengal has a population of 45 millions.

Dr. Bentley, our Director of Public Health, holds the view that the ' integrity of the Bengal rivers and water-channels (*khals*) should be maintained, their respective spill areas preserved and normal inundation encouraged '. The truth is, the Government should undertake a fresh survey of the entire river system of the province, followed by definite schemes for the restoration of that system where it has become moribund and for river-training where such control is necessary.

I shall certainly keep you informed about the progress of the Agricultural Commission when it commences its task.

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Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Conoor
(1926)

From my Journal.

The journey from Coimbatore was very pleasant ; the physical aspects of these hills are in many ways remarkable not only for their abundant vegetation but for the grandeur which distinguishes the Nilgiris from the hills of the Western Ghats. The hills rise rather abruptly from the flat country and as soon as you are on the hill road you find yourself in the midst of an indigenous sub-tropical vegetation which must be a source of great attraction to plant ecologists.

At the time of the announcement of the Agricultural Commission a Bengalee journalist suggested through

his journal that there should be a thorough investgation of the Nutritional System of India instead. We are here to learn from Lieut.-Colonel McCarrison some of the results of his enquiry into the causes of the ' deficiency diseases '.

The relation of diet to certain diseases has long been suspected. Scurvy and beri-beri or epidemic dropsy are two of the diseases which are considered to be due to dietary deficiency.

The Pasteur Institute at Coonoor owes its inception to the generous donation from Mr. Henry Phipps, who left in the hands of Lord Curzon the sum of £30,000 for the advancement of research in India. Lieut.-Colonel McCarrison was given facilities here to carry on his research work, funds for which were provided by the Indian Research Fund Association. There are three laboratories at his disposal and a number of small houses where pigeons, rats, guinea pigs, etc., are kept. These animals are required for the dietary experiments. Perhaps the most interesting experiment was to determine the relative values of national diets of India tested on groups of animals of the same original weight. Thus, we saw rats fed with diets representative of different peoples, such as Sikhs, Marathas, Pathans, Gurkhas, Kanarese, Bengalees, and Madrasees. One would at once see the difference between rats fed with the Sikh diet and those that had the Bengalee diet. The Sikh rats were healthy, vigorous and rather docile ; but the Bengalee rats were poor in health and extremely irritable and so were the Madrasee rats. Thus, the rats that were living on inferior diets were more irritable than the well-fed ones. So, malnutrition may be the root cause of political discontent which finds expression among the Bengalees and Madrasees !

Rice is a fundamentally poor diet as shown from the physique and behaviour of the rats who had the disadvantage of living for 140 days on the diet of the

Bengalees. To rice as the basal diet he added vitamins A and B and made up the deficiency of rice by adding substances such as manganese, etc. The interesting result obtained from the experiment is that it demonstrates quite clearly the fundamental poverty of rice in these two vitamins and that the addition of other ingredients does not make the diet as efficient as wheat alone. We were shown a number of pigeons fed with a diet of (*a*) polished, (*b*) autoclaved, (*c*) unhusked rice. He was able to produce typical symptoms of polyneuritis in pigeons fed with polished and autoclaved rice. These and other experiments have thrown much light on the relation between faulty nutrition and physical deterioration.

Then, about his experiments of the influence of soil conditions upon the nutritive value of food grains. The manurial treatment of the soil makes a great difference in the nutritive value of crops. Thus, the nutritive and vitamin values of the millet grown on the soil treated with farmyard manure are markedly superior to those of millet grown on the soil treated with a complete chemical manure. In the case of wheat, the nutritive value of the crop on soil treated with farmyard manure is approximately 17 per cent higher than the crop grown on soil treated with complete chemical manure. The cereals obtained from exhausted soils are extremely deficient in vitamins.

What is the effect of irrigation on the nutritive value of crops grown has also been an important line of investigation. The experiments are still in progress, but the results obtained so far indicate that nutritive value of rice is influenced by the conditions of the water supply under which the crop is grown. It is found that the rice grown under wet conditions has a low content of vitamins of the water soluble—B class. All these experiments open a wide field of research for correlating nutritional requirements of plants, animals and men. It was clear from what we heard today from

Lieut.-Colonel McCarrison that malnutrition renders millions of the population of India inefficient and extremely susceptible to diseases such as leprosy, hookworm and lathyrism. He has indicated the root cause of physical deficiency of the masses in India.

I am happy to record here that our appreciation of his work took the form of a generous donation by one of our colleagues, Raja Sri Krishna Chandra Gajapati Narayana Deo of Parlakimedi. He listened with profound sympathy to the harrowing description of the Indian masses who suffer from malnutrition and realized that a great deal of research had to be conducted with a view to finding where the deficiencies lay and how they could be made up. Therefore, his generous heart responded to the need of carrying on such investigations and he offered the Government of Madras Rs. 1 lakh (£7,500) for the continuance of nutritional research on the lines already followed by Lieut.-Colonel McCarrison. We all felt happy and proud that one of the members of the Royal Commission was able to show such a practical appreciation of Lieut.-Colonel McCarrison's work. Indeed, the human factor is the most important for raising agricultural efficiency; but in India we have utterly neglected this problem. As I write these lines I remember Lieut.-Colonel McCarrison's words in his memorandum before the Commission: 'Of all the disabilities from which the masses in India suffer, malnutrition is, perhaps, the chief.'

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Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Coimbatore
(1926)

To a friend in England.

Your letter reached me in Madras, one of the provinces where experimental measures of Prohibition have been adopted; but it is too early to judge their

results. I am told the people resent this interference with their obtaining a drink! Prohibition is primarily a *moral* question and therefore it is necessary to carry out intensive propaganda among the people for impressing upon them the evils of alcohol. The cry against the Government excise policy is that it is pursued with the object of securing revenue. The extent to which the various provincial governments depend upon this source of revenue may be seen from the following figures:

Provinces	Percentage of excise revenue as compared with total revenue of the Provincial Government (1924-5)
Madras	38·2
Bihar and Orissa .. .	32·8
Assam	28·6
Central Provinces and Berar	28·6
Bombay (including Sind) ..	28·1
Bengal	20·7
United Provinces	13·0
Punjab	12·2
Burma	11·3

The figures[1] for *net* Excise Revenue in British India are also given here:

Year	
1922-3 ..	£13,817,000
1923-4	£14,403,000
1924-5	£14,453,000

But the revenue figures alone should not be taken as an index to growing drink-habits. The rates of

[1] The average figure for the quinquennium 1925-30 is £14,990,000.

excise duties have been considerably raised—and then there is also the other factor, an increase of population. On the whole, it cannot be urged that the consumption of country spirit is increasing.

Gandhi has undoubtedly stirred public opinion in India against the drink traffic, but I have not so far come across a constructive scheme which may be administratively practicable for attaining this desirable end under the conditions obtaining in India. Any drastic measures will involve a great risk, and may result in postponing the day for complete prohibition.

It is not, however, true that the authorities are reluctant to propose measures which would substantially reduce the Excise revenue. I am informed by the officials that they would welcome prohibition provided that the cost involved in making the measure effective, and the loss of revenue consequent upon prohibition, are met from some other sources. A well-known public man here suggested that a heavy luxury tax might be imposed for combating the drink evil. You should give him credit for his good intentions!

You ask me about the drink problem in the Indian States. I am sorry I am not acquainted with it; but I hear that in the state of Travancore, the policy of Local Option is being energetically pursued. Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal decreed prohibition within her Dominion. If these experiments and those that are being tried in certain districts of Madras and the Central Provinces are proved to be successful, the results will then be helpful in revising the Government excise policy.

The contract distillery system has indeed been a source of corruption, and the Government policy is to abolish the system by taking over the distilleries under direct state management. This works well, I think. Then, steps are taken to reduce the consumption of country liquors by a system of rationing; but I do not know its details.

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Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Coimbatore, Madras
(1926)

To a British Statesman.

One of the distinguished officials of the Indian Medical Service told the Commission that the bulk of the rural population of this Presidency suffers from malnutrition. He also informed us that hookworm[1] was widespread throughout the province. This disease is due to infection through the feet, from water polluted by filth. Thus, malnutrition, hookworm and chronic poverty all combine to produce a depressing picture of rural Madras. The cultivator of this hookworm-infected province has a poor physique and his environment defies description. The existence of this revolting spectre may or may not be due to British rule; but there is no excuse whatsoever for the continuance of conditions of life under which your fellow citizens of the British Empire in Madras live. The medievalism of the country offers resistance to progress, I admit. But how would you justify the fact that there was no co-ordinated system of public health administration till 1923? Out of a total provincial income of 1,648 lakhs of rupees (£12,360,000), the Government spent only 12 lakhs (£90,000) for Public Health and Sanitation in 1923-4. Is this the way you are going to discharge your duties as trustees of the Indian people? . . .

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Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Karachi
(1927)

To a friend in Great Britain.

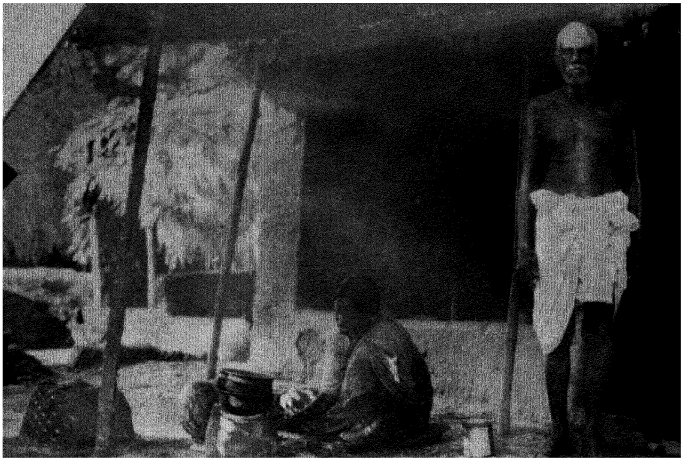
On our arrival at Bombay, a number of press reporters came on board anxious to pick up bits of

[1] A disease caused by an intestinal parasite.

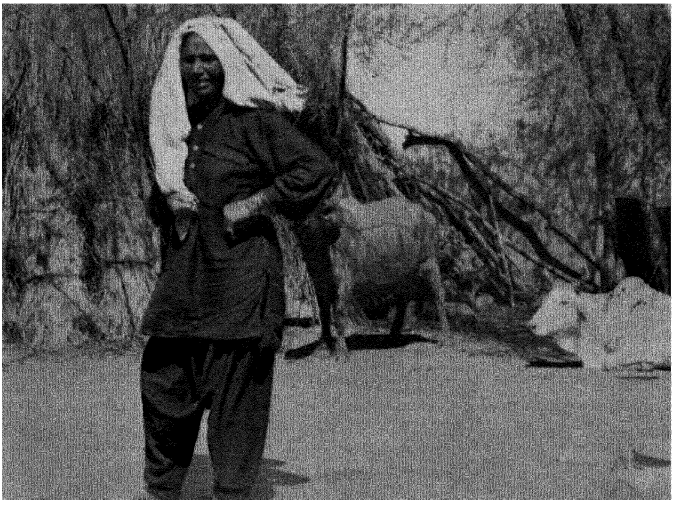
news about the Commission. But one of the first questions put to me was about Miss Mayo's book, *Mother India*. My reply did not please the questioner; for I said, in an epigram, that the contents of the book should be forgotten by the western world, but must be remembered by every honest Indian.

Indeed, I do not see why there should be so much furore over this exposure of evils that really exist in our social life. Gandhi may label the authoress a drain inspectress; but no healthy civilized life is possible unless a vigilant watch is kept over the sanitation of our habitations. Of course, there are in this book many exaggerations and, in some instances, gross misrepresentations. But a sanitary inspectress from a young community of the western world may err; or is apt to lay emphasis on the wrong syllable. 'Never mind that', I say to my enraged countrymen, 'there is nothing really new in this powerful exposure of our social system. The fact of its being attacked by an American authoress may hurt our susceptibilities, but we do deserve to be hurt.' I am, of course, regarded as an outcaste for such views!

Hinduism is guided by *Varnashrama* (caste) and we cannot deny that the excrescences from this rigid system offer a stubborn resistance to fresh ideas. It clogs the wheel of progress and counteracts the efforts of leavening of our social life by permeation of regenerative forces. Let my countrymen ponder over the fundamental evils which render even the semblance of political unity almost impossible. Besides, the caste system tolerates such horrible cruelties that any civilized government would be justified in suppressing them. But—we have the Queen's Proclamation: no interference with practices sanctioned by Indian religions! Meanwhile numerous hydra-headed abnormalities, springing from the quasi-religious beliefs of the Hindus, distort their socio-economic life to the extent of involving a degree of moral degradation of



UNTOUCHABLES AT HOME, NEAR MADRAS



WIFE OF PUNJAB RYOT

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the people. I understand the historical reasons for the policy of non-interference pursued by the British Government ; but it has, I think, been carried too far. It is incumbent upon the Government to strengthen the hands of the reformers in their campaign against some of the gruesome customs that vitally affect the welfare of the masses. The Indian politicians find a panacea for all ills in the magic word ' self-government ', but that will never be a reality so long as our social foundations remain fundamentally weak. How can we hope to construct a political edifice of the twentieth century on such foundations ?

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Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Karachi
(1927)

To a friend in India.

You have entirely misunderstood my remarks about Miss Mayo's notorious book. No sane Indian can defend the calumnies heaped upon his country by this female jingo from America. In every page of the book one can find evidence of her racial prejudice, of her supreme arrogance as belonging to the ' white race '. But, what was the use in giving so much importance to this purblind propagandist ? I wonder why men like Lord Sinha, Mr. Gandhi and many other notable Indians, granted her interviews ? Would an obscure journalist from India have so easy access to, let us say, Mr. Hearst, Professor Dewey, and other eminent Americans ?

What I said to the representative of the Associated Press was that the evils enumerated by Miss Mayo were known to every educated Indian and that this violent exposure should rouse us to greater activities in accelerating the progress in social reforms. We should remember that our social outlook is still

medieval, that our society still clings to customs and usages such as have no place in modern civilization ; and that unless and until our social structure is readjusted to new social values, the curse of political subjection and economic bondage will hang over us. Miss Mayo has certainly reminded us of this curse.

My opinion in regard to this book is somewhat like that recently expressed by Mrs. Margaret Cousins, Secretary to the Women's Association in India. She says : 'While we repudiate her book, we must turn every ounce of our zeal towards the rooting out of those social evils which are undoubtedly in our midst.'

I believe *Varnashrama Dharma* is a serious obstacle to educational progress. Not only is this conception responsible to a great extent for the present deplorable state of illiteracy in India, but it is creating perilous disruptive forces within our social life.

Then I think that one of the potent causes of racial decay is child marriage. It is because of this custom that the progress of female education has been so slow ; and our system of primary education can never bear fruit if the pupils have to live in an illiterate home. Throughout this tour I have had enough evidence of the enervating influence of ritualism upon the bulk of the people. Look at a congregation of villagers—they seem so lifeless ; something appears to stifle their self-expression. Ah, my friend, freedom which is the breath of life is gone both from their society and from their mind. Will mere enfranchisement supply them with the essential impulses for reviving their life ? No ; our foremost duty is to plan out a nation-wide campaign against illiteracy. I know, funds are inadequate ; but, can we not think of exploring some new sources of income for mass-education ? During my visit to Madras, it occurred to me that a portion of the rich endowments attached to the temples should be rendered available for this purpose and the administration of the fund should be left in the hands of a

properly constituted Board. Remember, you will have no adequate funds in the future Provincial Governments. All the equipment necessary for setting up a so-called Parliamentary form of Government will cost more than the incomes of the Provinces. I say 'so-called' deliberately; for, as the late Mr. Montagu once observed: 'Western political institutions could only be attained by western social development.'

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Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Mahabaleswar
(1928)

To a friend in England.

We are now settling down to sift, study and discuss the evidence and reports that are in our possession. The problems concerning the welfare of the Indian masses are so inter-related that it is difficult to single out one single aspect and say that its solution would put the matter right. Rural India is involved in a vicious circle. Last week I was reading the evidence supplied to us by the Directors of Public Health of the provinces. These officers do not attempt to whitewash the official policy or minimize the gravity of inadequate health organizations in a country where a large mass of people live under the most primitive and insanitary surroundings. We have no Ministry of Public Health. There is a Public Health Commissioner in the Central Government who is chiefly concerned with international and quarantine questions. Since the introduction of the Reforms, the promotion of public health in the provinces has not been the concern of the Central Government. In the campaign of retrenchment that followed the Reforms, the Inchcape Commission actually recommended the abolition of the office of Public Health Commissioner, but,

fortunately, the Secretary of State did not allow this to happen, although the Government of India accepted the Inchcape proposal.

Providence alone knows what is going to happen under the new constitution! Dyarchy will probably be given a burial; that is, there will remain no division of subjects. In other words, we will have provincial autonomy. But it should not mean that the Central Government will have no concern with matters that affect the welfare of India as a whole.

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Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Mahabaleswar
(1928)

To a social worker.

The more I study the evidence and reports on the subjects of our enquiry, the more I realize the truth of your remark: 'How in conscience is India to be rehabilitated on the foundations of bankrupt peasantry?' A careful estimate made by the Department of Agriculture, Madras, shows that the income per capita of the cultivator is a little over 4 annas (4½d.) a day. The Madras Prison diet costs the Government over 3 annas (3·375d.) a day per head, and rations are of course based on the cheapest dietary on which a man can just be kept in 'working order'.

And yet the natural resources of India are vast and can easily provide the elementary necessities of life. We need a rapid process of industrialization but the greatest material resource of all is the soil. We are told by the Agricultural Adviser to the Government of India that 'most of the area under cultivation in India has been under cultivation for hundreds of years, and had reached its state of maximum impoverishment many years ago'. There, I believe, is the secret of this bankrupt state of Indian agriculture.

But I think the root cause of backward agriculture lies in the poor mental and moral equipment of the bulk of the people. Lala Lajput Rai once remarked that the Indian mind was for some centuries in a state of captivity. Our soil is impoverished largely because of our mental inertia. Can you tell me why these millions of poor cultivators tolerate the conditions of life that surround them ?

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Ballygunj,
Calcutta
(1928)

To a friend in Great Britain.

. . . The fourteenth chapter of the Report of the Agricultural Commission may provide you with several interesting and important clues for a number of popular articles in *The Times Educational Supplement* on Indian Education. I hope you will write them. Our Chairman himself took up the cause of female education, the importance of which, in the solution of illiteracy, was not adequately realized in India. But, can there be much progress in this direction unless child marriage is abolished by some legislative enactment ? That is why the Brahmo Samaj lay so much emphasis on radical social reforms as preludes to *real* national regeneration. During the 'seventies, the Brahmo Samaj carried on vigorous campaigns in Bengal for abolishing child marriage, for the removal of caste restrictions and for the spread of female education. My father was drawn into this movement and had to leave his orthodox home. Hundreds joined the movement and I heard many exciting stories of its encounters with Hindu orthodoxy. During Sir Richard Temple's visit to Dacca in 1874 (Sir Richard was then the Lieutenant-Governor of

the Province) an Indian Journal—*Banga Bandhu*[1]—published an article entitled: 'What we want from Sir Richard Temple.' The journal, voicing the sentiment of the reformists, demanded female education.

But, social customs, the blindness of orthodoxy and the lack of initiative on the part of the Government made the progress of female education extremely slow. As a matter of fact, until recently the problem has not been seriously considered. Would you believe that, according to the quinquennial report (1917-22), only 0·9 per cent of the Hindu female population and 1·1 per cent of the Mohammedan attend some sort of School? Even these attendance figures seem to be too high and I would warn you not to be led by our school enrolment figures.

The other day Dr. Jenkins, a special Educational Officer of the Bengal Government, addressed the Calcutta Rotary Club. I liked his outspoken speech. About the financial assistance received from the Government, he said:

'Bengal has two-thirds of the number of High Schools in England, and yet they received in Government assistance only one hundred and sixtieth of the amount granted at home. The Government was contributing 12·5 lakhs (£93,750) per annum towards the upkeep of the aided High Schools. An additional 12·5 lakhs would suffice to guarantee reasonable minimum salaries to all teachers and to grant aid to all efficient High Schools, provided the system was overhauled and reorganized.'

And to the much maligned schoolmasters he showed some justice by admitting that

'the conditions under which the teachers worked almost condoned the great deficiencies, and their economic position necessitated their undertaking a considerable amount of work out of school hours. In fact they began their school duties tired and disheartened.'

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[1] Literally 'Friend of Bengal'.

The position of our primary and secondary schools is deplorable ; and yet the Despatch of 1854 recognized that the responsibility for popular education rested with the Government of India and that it was one of their ' most sacred duties ', etc. And you will remember that the Despatch definitely stated that ' the higher classes will now be gradually called upon to depend more upon themselves '. A quarter of a century later an Education Commission recognized the urgent need of raising the mass of the people and observed that ' the only fitting remedy for the present state of things is a wide extension of primary and secondary education '. In 1928, the Report of the Agricultural Commission reiterated these pious observations ; and I am sure that the Report of the Auxiliary Committee of the Indian Statutory Commission, appointed to make a survey of the growth of education, will urge the need of a progressive mass-education policy.

About the financial question raised by Dr. Jenkins, I would say that only a small percentage of the total educational expenditure comes from the Government Treasury. Local bodies, fees, public funds—these are the main sources from which the system is financed, but it is run by a *costly* educational service from the seat of the provincial government. The educational policy, finance and administrative control of different branches of education, and the training of teachers—all these seem to be in a topsy-turvy condition. If the Government realize that they have a special responsibility towards the education of the masses, they should now be prepared to free Higher Education from Government control and finance. Let a large share of the resources of the State now be devoted to the problems of mass-education, and not to satisfy the Indian ' literary castes ' !

57

Ballygunj,
Calcutta
(1928)

To a colleague in the Royal Agricultural Commission.

I went to see Sir P——. His criticism of the Report of the Commission was that we had not adequately emphasized the root causes of rural indebtedness and that we passed lightly over the misery arising from litigation. The Indian law courts are deadly institutions,—extravagant, expensive and dishonest and they are maintained by the Government because the income from judicial stamps is a profitable source of revenue, and so on.

All this is true, but an Agricultural Commission could not very well examine this question in greater detail. I hope when the time will come for the revision of the Indian Constitution, the judicial system of the country will be carefully scrutinized. But mind you, the Indian law courts are perhaps the most favourite haunts of the middle class who reap richer harvests from litigation than the 'Satanic' Government. The fees—the perusal fee, the consultation fees, usual daily fees—are very high and bear no relation to the general economic conditions of the people. During the high tide of the Gandhi movement, Pandit Motilal Nehru who has had a record of thirty-seven years experience in the legal profession, admitted that 'the moral tone of the profession has steadily declined'.

Our conversation then turned on what he called the 'second omission' in the Report: we had not said much about rural industries. I pointed out that we did and that if our recommendations were implemented by the Provincial Departments of Industries, a great step forward would be taken. But no recommendations could alter the circumstances under which rural

industries are relegated to the illiterate backward castes. Again, a case for social reform before the attainment of a genuine democracy.

Then the third was a complete absence of any suggestion in regard to land tenure systems. The question was not included in our terms of reference, as I pointed out to Sir P——; but he was suspicious of Government's motives in excluding the problems concerning land reform from our Enquiry. I agreed that the Government would soon have to consider the reform of agrarian laws and customs and our Report was a preliminary step towards that direction.

Finally, we both agreed upon the necessity of reviving village communities and other local self-governing bodies. 'Can we hope to organize a village society without the authority and influence of caste?' I asked him. He replied in the affirmative and went on to say how common economic needs (e.g. the *charka*) were providing new foundations for rural organizations. We both regretted that Lord Ripon's reform of local self-government in the 'eighties was rendered more or less sterile by the safeguards imposed on them. Were the safeguards, or, rather, the limitations, alone responsible for the failure of local self-government? I believe the indifference of our educated classes towards local bodies, due partly to the lures of town life and largely to scepticism in regard to the revival of village communities, has sterilized the efforts in their very inception. I do not, however, under-estimate the evil influences of over-centralization.

However, the local bodies must be revived and made to function before we may hope to establish a basis for corporate life which alone will supply elements for the achievement of that sombre political ideal—'the representative and responsible form of Government'.

58

Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1930)

To a schoolmaster in Bengal.

I am glad you are making a sincere effort to adapt the curriculum of your school to the environment of the pupils. It should not however mean that you would narrow the scope and purpose of education. Please try to interest the parents of your pupils in your school—that is, I think, very important. From what I know of Bengal villagers, they are not devoid of common sense and the elders really possess a certain amount of perspicacity.

I recognize the fact that the real difficulty will arise from the insufficiency of funds at your disposal. But I believe it will not prove to be insuperable if you succeed in educating the people to tax themselves for finding money for local purposes. What is the attitude of the District Board towards you and your enthusiasm? It is necessary that you should take interest in the affairs of local bodies; but keep yourself immune from village factions. There is no hope of popularizing primary education in our eighty-five thousand Bengal villages unless determined efforts are made by the educated villagers to provide new sources of income for social services in their own villages.

In England, local wants are met by local direct taxes. With our people in rural areas the periodical direct tax, however small the tax may be, appears to be burdensome. The cultivator has no sense of thrift, and therefore even for a small sum required to meet taxes he has, in many instances, to borrow from the money-lender. I am inclined to believe that a system of indirect taxation is more suitable to our illiterate, poor masses. You see, the pressure of an indirect tax is more gradual and is therefore far better sustained

by such a people. Besides an indirect tax does not open a way for illegal exactions. That is why, I suppose, the various forms of cesses imposed by the administration are so unpopular, and I do believe they are likely to prove oppressive. It is not unknown to our rulers that whenever a fresh demand is made upon the landlords, the majority of them endeavour to reimburse themselves by exacting additional 'abwabs' from their tenants. When the question of education cess came up for discussion in the Bengal Legislative Council, I heard a young landlord say that the landlords' share of the cess was in reality an advance made by them, the whole of which would have to be ultimately paid by the people.

I am all for empowering local bodies with authority for raising money to meet local needs; but some arrangement must be made in order to respect the autonomous character of these bodies. I mean that provincial authorities should not retain the power of meddlesome interference with the management of, for instance, those primary and secondary schools under local self-government. It is absurd to exercise control over them from the seat of the Government and I am afraid it is precisely this attempt that has ruined the national character of indigenous schools and has destroyed the chance of primary education ever becoming self-supporting. . . .

59

Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1930)

To a colleague in the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture.

You were so interested in the problems of rural health in course of our enquiry that I should like you to glance through the Report of Dr. Bentley,[1] a copy

[1] Director of Public Health, Bengal. Report for 1927-8.

of which I am sending you. Every member of Indian legislatures and of Parliament should read this account of the conditions of Bengal's health. One little extract may give you an idea of the state of things. Dr. Bentley writes : ' The present peasantry of Bengal are in a very large proportion taking to a dietary on which even rats could not live for more than five weeks. Their vitality is now so undermined by inadequate diet that they cannot stand the infection of foul diseases.' The diet is not only lacking in nutrition but is in many cases inadequate. No wonder malaria has such a grip on the population.

I had an interview with an official here when we discussed at length some of the main problems affecting rural areas in this Province. He repeatedly asserted that the prevalent misery of the bulk of the people was due to mental inertia. This may be true but is certainly not the whole truth. I suggested that this inertia springs from utter hopelessness in the face of a most depressing environment. You cannot attribute it to religious faith under the impulse of which India once upon a time built up a great tradition in art and architecture. No, fatalism is the inevitable consequence of living under conditions which are unparalleled in any civilized country.

While I do not overlook the fact that there are certain customs and practices which constitute the chief obstacles in the way of improving public health in India, I am convinced that the Public Health Service of the Government is inadequate and inefficient. The Government cannot take shelter under the plea that ' religion kills more people in India today than the British Public Health machine could save if it were trebled in size or strength '. We have evidence to show that there is a growing popular demand for improved hygienic conditions and that by actual demonstration and sanitary education the superstitions of the people can be dispelled.

In an interesting book, *The Medical Profession in India*, by Sir Patrick Hehir, the author endorses what we have emphasized in our Report. He says: 'What is required is a proper executive service of all ranks, more especially for rural India. The main mass of the revenue is derived from the soil, but the vast majority of the villages receive nothing in the way of sanitary attention and the machinery is not well devised for striking swiftly and surely at epidemics.'

But the necessary funds for the promotion of Public Health in India are not available, and, I fear, the situation will not be favourable under a new constitution which is likely to increase expenditure in running the vessel of the State! Whenever the government feel the need of drastic economies, the axe of retrenchment will fall on public health, medical research and general education. The makers of the Indian constitution must learn that there can be no proper economic development of the country so long as the physical well-being of the population is relegated to the background.

Chapter IV

RURAL RECONSTRUCTION IN INDIA

60

Behala
(1922)

To a Social Service worker.

I have read with great interest your letter and the questions you put to me; but I cannot sympathize with you in your pessimism. To lose hope is to acknowledge defeat. Besides, we have not as yet seriously faced the problems of rural reconstruction. If we realize that our village community is in the throes of dissolution, our first and foremost task is to face the situation with courage and hope.

The chief trouble, I think, lies in the fact that we do not know the Indian masses and they do not know us. They are isolated from us, and in this phase of isolation we have split up our socio-economic structure into a thousand units. The circumstances that have created this state of affairs need not be discussed here; but one thing we all must remember is that the heart of the Indian masses is still responsive to a living touch. They are grateful and unsophisticated; they still retain, in the midst of all aberrations of priest-craft, spiritual power; they still have faith in ultimate Good (*Sivam*). Tell them a story from our Epics, their faces would brighten up; recite some incidents of the lives of the Saints, you would make them happy. Believe me, India's real salvation will come from the masses.

I agree with you that the conditions obtaining in Behala are not typical of a Bengal village. It is much

too near Calcutta. But, our main object is to train a band of young men for village welfare work and to evolve appropriate methods for a survey of rural conditions. An accurate survey of every phase of rural life gives a direction towards the formulation of a programme of work ; it reveals to the workers both the strength and weakness of social life ; it also supplies them with psychological data without which they are unable to form a judgement as to the best methods of approach to rural welfare.

Then, I lay great stress on our own study of Indian epics, history, geography (especially of Bengal). Two of our workers have been trying to trace the history of Behala.

It seems to me that your difficulty is that you want to draw up a *definite* programme before you actually start the work. The best way would be to get on with a provisional plan and *to prepare your own mind.*

When Demosthenes was asked what the first qualification of an orator was, he is said to have replied —action ; when asked what the second qualification was he replied—action ; and the third, action. Similarly if you ask what is the essential qualification of a public man in Bengal, the answer is—action in order to ameliorate the conditions of Bengal peasantry. Before you plan a superstructure of national life, you must build New Foundations. That is our supreme task—a task far more important than that of being actively engaged in political agitation. Our fight is not for and on behalf of the organized privileged minorities. We should stand by the rural masses of Bengal. It is in their redemption that India must find her way to *Swaraj*. The task before us is to educate and organize her peasantry, artisans and labourers. The Indian peasant must find in us a true friend and guide. He does not understand what place he occupies in the entire economic structure of the country; nor is he aware of the conditions over which

he must obtain his due share of control in order to protect his interests. The first objective in a programme of Rural Reconstruction must be, in my judgement, directed to the means by which he may be made conscious of his legitimate rights so that he himself may know what to demand and how to demand.

61

Behala, Bengal
(1922)

To a friend in India.

I am grateful to you for sending me the printed leaflets about the *Kishan Sabha*. Any movement that aims at building up effective organizations for the protection of cultivators' interests has my deep sympathy; but there is a grave risk of such a movement being drawn into the boiling cauldron of political unrest. Already the *Kishan Sabha* has become a part of the non-co-operation movement. That is, I think, fatal. My idea of agriculturists' organization is that it should be, at this stage, independent of any political alliance; that its object should be confined to the betterment of the economic conditions; and that it should endeavour to bring about a change in the outlook of our peasantry. I am not in favour of stirring the masses just for political demonstrations; I want to rouse their mind from lethargy through the realization that their welfare lies in their own hands.

The *Kishan Sabha* should, I think, be mainly an economic organization designed to train its members in the principles of co-operation. Awaken in its members a sense of responsibility, a spirit of self-help, and you will prepare the way for better relations between them and the organized privileged classes. From what I have seen, and see every day here, these classes are chiefly responsible for the demoralization of the village

communal life made so conspicuous in factious bickerings. The task before the *Kishan Sabha* should be to arrest these symptoms of demoralization by sympathetic co-operative efforts. Some of the workers of Karmi Sangha have been trying to set up arbitration courts, in the neighbouring villages. Just as we provide free medical help, we offer the villagers free legal advice if they agree to have their disputes settled by an Arbitration court. Three young lawyers of Calcutta have agreed to serve in such courts if our efforts are successful. But lawyer's touts are already busy in this neighbourhood. If the *Kishan Sabha* directs its attention to such problems, I am sure it will earn the sympathy of all social workers in rural areas.

I am convinced the no-rent campaign is an injudicious step ; it will only precipitate a crisis which may result in further estrangement between the tillers of the soil and the landlords. I agree with you that the time has come for agrarian reform and that the illiterate peasants are quite defenceless in protecting their interests. But let us not seek remedies through revolt. There lies a vast field of agricultural legislation in India based on adequate appreciation of the problems that affect the peasantry. Let us put our minds into the studies and investigations. I have been trying to persuade the University of Calcutta to include agricultural economics as a *compulsory* subject for post-graduate teaching; but with no success. Sir Ashutosh Mukerjee is, however, convinced that it should be done and gives me encouragement by assuring me of constituting a Faculty of Agriculture in the University as soon as he finds an opportunity. He is convinced that effort should be made as speedily as possible to make his University a centre for imparting a scientific agricultural education in Bengal. Would the Government assist him in this direction ? Would the Honourable Minister co-operate with him in securing what is so much needed in Bengal ? I wonder.

62

Behala, Bengal
(1922)

To a Social Service worker.

We had recently a meeting of village elders from a number of neighbouring villages. They showed a great deal of interest in our proposals for rural reconstruction, but wanted definite guidance in order to make a beginning with any scheme. —— volunteered to go and live in a village provided he was assured of immunity from police vigilance! I suggested that the *daroga* of the village *thana* should be invited to take some part in the work of rural reconstruction. . . . What struck me was the medieval outlook of these good folks, and it is against this medievalism manifested in our social life that organized attack is needed.

The Congress platform with all the temptation of honours bestowed upon stump orators does not attract me. I recognize the need of agitation in order to assert our just claims for a share in the government of the country; but the Congress is now swamped by a majority of mediocrities and petty adventurers and its form of moral protest against the present régime is nothing better than mendicancy. And you see what is happening—a grave revival of communal antagonism, fragmentation within its own body and disappearance from its ranks of men with sober judgement and comprehensive vision of our problems.

For my own part, I adhere to my conviction that only by a persistent attack upon our social and economic systems may we succeed in evolving a situation that would lead to our political goal. I do not suggest for a moment that politics and economics can be isolated one from the other; but this policy of obstruction to the Government as upheld by the present Congress, seems to be futile. The spirit evoked by the pursuance of this policy carries with it, I fear, elements

of its own destruction; it is so devoid of political acumen that failure is inevitable. In spite of the loud assertion, of 'soul force', the Congress has already failed to achieve unity! The trouble lies, I believe, in our entire social system which breeds moral cowardice and mental servitude. Cure? A social revolution.

I was therefore happy to know that you had thought of returning to your own district and planned to work out welfare centres in villages. Whatever may be the concrete results of your efforts, I am sure you will gain an insight into the heart of our rural problems.

63

Behala, Bengal
(1922)

To a wealthy citizen of Calcutta.

I went to see the *pinjaropole* at Lillooh (Howrah). May I say how disappointed I was? If this is what is meant by our devotion to *Gomata* (mother cow), then I say it is indeed one of the glaring instances of our hypocrisy. You will forgive me for my impatience and allow me to express quite candidly my feelings in regard to this cant of 'cow-protection'.

Time and again it is asserted that cow-protection is an article of the Hindu faith. Mahatma Gandhi declared that 'cow-protection is the dearest possession of the Hindu heart. It is the one concrete belief common to all Hindus. No one who does not believe in cow-protection, can possibly be a Hindu. It is a noble belief. Cow-protection means brotherhood of man and beast.'

It fell to my lot to spend a number of years in the Western countries as a student of agriculture; and I had assiduously studied the conditions of livestock in all the civilized countries. I assure you without any fear of contradiction that in no country in the world are cattle so ill-fed and neglected as in India; nowhere

have I seen such cruelty towards cattle as I see in this country.

During the present agitation led by Mahatma Gandhi, frequent reference has been made to ' cow-protection '. I had hoped that at long last a concrete plan for *real* protection of India's cattle wealth might emerge from the interest thus aroused. But so far there is no such indication. As you know, I do not belong to the Congress camp, but I have repeatedly requested its leaders to undertake such constructive measures as would render fruitful service to the masses. The improvement of Indian livestock, the provision for adequate veterinary assistance and the reorganization of *pinjaropoles* are some of the items I suggested for their inclusion in an organized plan of action. But I have had no response from them.

The trouble is, such problems are hopelessly mixed up with our platform politics. Mahatma himself writes in *Young India* that ' the best and only way to save the cow is to save the *Khilafat* '. Writing about the Shikarpur Municipality's attempt to secure legal protection for the cow, he remarked as follows : ' Let the Shikarpuris one and all become true non-co-operators and hasten the redress of the *Khilafat* wrong. I promise, they will save the cow when they have done their utmost to save the *Khilafat.*'

So far none of his followers has clearly explained to me the relation between the cow-protection and the Treaty of Sèvres. I am prepared to be enlightened upon this seemingly absurd statement.

But I am writing to you particularly about the *pinjaropole.* It cannot be disputed that there is a great prevalence of epizootic diseases among cattle and that veterinary help available for combating the menace is inadequate. May it not be possible to organize a proper veterinary section here ? In view of the prevalence of disease, would it not be a real service to the dumb refugees of the *pinjaropole* if you make

arrangements for effective isolation of infected cattle so that healthy ones may not suffer ?

Your community is rich ; and we know and respect your attitude of reverence for life which is one of the cardinal principles of Jainism. To you, therefore, one may look for an organized attempt to solve our cattle problem. It consists of (*a*) fodder supply, (*b*) breeding, (*c*) protection from preventive diseases. A comprehensive policy, based on each of these items, constitutes in my own mind real ' cow-protection '. The apathy of those who are in a position to grapple with these problems is regrettable, and is one of the instances of our demoralization resulting from our absolute dependence on Government.

Through you I appeal to your community and to the trustees of the *pinjaropoles* for remodelling this institution on a scientific basis. It is not difficult for you to assemble such resources as are required for organizing dairy farms and factories in places where conditions are not unfavourable. Difficulties there are, but they are not insurmountable. I beg you to reflect on the figures of infant mortality in our cities, the main cause of which may be attributed to the appalling conditions of the milk supply.

As an example of what can be achieved in improving such conditions by ' non-official ' efforts, I would refer you to the history of the milk supply in the city of New York. Having lost a son through contaminated milk, Mr. Nathan Straus, a wealthy citizen, was determined to make clean and pasteurized milk available to all. He started milk depots and organized milk production. Ten years ago I visited some of these depots in New York. Today about 98 per cent of the milk sold in that great city is pasteurized. What he has done for New York can be done for Calcutta if only a few wealthy citizens realize the grave consequences of neglecting *Gomata*, although we hold her in veneration.

And it is ridiculous that we have made this veneration an excuse for communal squabbles. Recently a member of the All-India Cow Conference stated in an interview with an American visitor that the true cause of Indian unrest was ' the Englishman's fondness for beef steak '. Such absurd statements only make us look utterly foolish in the eyes of the civilized world.

64

Behala, Bengal
(1922)

To the Editor, *The Advance.*[1]

Since there is evidence of growing agrarian discontent in the country, I trust you will allow me a little space in your journal for certain observations in regard to the situation.

The Great War gave a strong impetus to the growth of self-consciousness in the peasantry in Europe. Since the dawn of the Industrial era, the entire outlook of European civilization has been dominated by commerce and industry, leaving the tillers of the soil little or no share in public life. Today the spirit of assertiveness among the peasants in almost every part of Europe gives fair warning to post-war politicians and industrialists of the need to walk warily. The growth of agrarian parties in Eastern Europe seeks to provide that balance in constitutional machinery the lack of which has created the wide gulf between rural and urban interests.

But where is India ? Is there any hope of forming a genuine agrarian party in Bengal ? Such a party should be a common concern of all the nebulous political parties and should supply some of the essential conditions required for rural reconstruction in the province. The parties may differ on the means and

[1] The letter was not published in the journal.

methods of their struggles with the Government, but here is a problem for the solution of which there need be no great differences among the party leaders. I would therefore suggest that a conference of all parties should be convened in a convenient place and that representatives of all non-official rural organizations should be invited to the Conference. The main object of the conference should be (1) to form a nucleus of an Agrarian Party in Bengal ; (2) to discuss some of the intractable problems that must be faced before Bengal can expect to revive her rural life ; (3) to persuade the landlords of the province to remedy the defects of the land tenure system ; and (4) to take steps for making the local bodies effective by stimulating the growth of civic sense among the rural population.

My own observation in regard to the needs of rural Bengal may be stated here. The first step towards rural rehabilitation is, I believe, to secure for the cultivator the right of freedom of property. This involves a change in the existing system of triple partnership. It would be an act of courageous statesmanship on the part of our landlords if they voluntarily agree to make appropriate changes (not mere protective measures against unfair land settlement) in the entire structure of the land tenure system of the province.

The second step is to reorganize village unions and other local bodies with the object of building up a corporate life. Here lies the vital germ of democracy. Modern political thought is gradually tending towards social groups analogous to the concepts of the Indian village communities. We would do well to modernize these institutions making them as symbols of social cohesion among the diverse elements of social structure. The caste system as an instrument of social tyranny must go. So long as this system is allowed to exert its corrosive influence, there can be no hope of creating a civic sense in the minds of the members of a village community.

The third step must be a deliberate attack on illiteracy. The removal of this dark ignorance of the bulk of our people is and must be a condition precedent to any substantial improvement in agriculture or in other spheres of life. How can there be any desire for improvement, for a better life, when, in their ignorance, the people believe that suffering is the road leading to spiritual enlightenment? They are taught to regard this life and its environment as being unreal and without value. The root cause of our social ills springs from ignorance and superstition.

I trust, Sir, that you will take the initiative in the matter of convening a conference as suggested in this letter. Those who, like myself, owe no allegiance to any political party, desire to see a co-operative effort in the direction of rural reconstruction and believe that a body of men trained in the work of organizing rural life can make a substantial contribution to India's struggle towards real freedom.

65

Behala, Bengal
(1922)

To a Congress politician of Bengal.

Though I do not belong to the Congress Party, I trust you will kindly take note of the contents of this letter in which I wish to offer one or two suggestions in regard to the need of a non-political organization for reaching the masses. The proposal to popularize the Congress by enlisting members on the payment of 4 annas (4½d.), does not commend itself to me. The only way of winning the confidence of the masses is to render some effective service to them through proper organizations. One of the urgent needs of our peasantry is adequate provision for credit facilities through co-operative banks. I understand that the Congress

has now a large fund at their disposal, derived from the Tilak Swarajya Fund.[1] May I suggest that a portion of this fund should be utilized for the purpose of (1) starting a Provincial Congress Co-operative Bank with a branch in each district; and (2) organizing a central school in Calcutta where a selected number of congress workers may be trained in co-operative methods?

The co-operative movement (though it has scarcely as yet earned the right to be called a movement) has not touched the fringe of agricultural indebtedness and has not made any appreciable impression on the rural population. Incidentally, through the banks of the kind I propose, the Congress may succeed in popularizing its ideals among the masses; and will certainly render a valuable service to them by saving them from the fatal grip of the money-lending classes. In the neighbourhood of this village, almost every cultivator is indebted. The rates of interest charged are very high. For small loans up to Rs. 50 the rate is 9 pies per rupee per month or over 56 per cent a year! Through the dealings of some of the village money-lenders I came to know for the first time how the Usury Laws are avoided. It is a common practice to compel the borrower to overstate the amount of debt and to pay interest in advance. Besides, most of these rural folks do not know the existence of the kind of protection to which they are entitled in the event of unfair exaction of interest on loans.

One of the potent causes of the growing indebtedness is to be found in the narrow margin which is left to the tiller of the soil from the produce of his land. Since all means of production eventually come under the operation of the Law of Diminishing Returns, I have been examining certain agricultural statistics of Bengal

[1] This fund was raised by Mr. Gandhi; it exceeded £750,000.

with special reference to it. And it is my impression that agriculture in Bengal is in a state of bankruptcy.

It should not be difficult to organize a central school in Calcutta for training co-operative workers. The Hindusthan Insurance Company may offer you facilities for carrying out both the proposals I venture to make here. It is futile to talk about rural reconstruction when the bulk of the rural population is under the *Mahajan's* grip. None of the diverse palliatives applied by some philanthropic bodies will do ; we have now to seek proper remedies if we want to save rural Bengal.

66

Behala, Bengal
(1923)

To a Social Service worker.

I have now to leave the work of this Institute for rural reconstruction and to proceed to England on study-leave. It is my hope that the work will be continued here under the guidance of some village elders who seem to have understood the effectiveness of our plan of work in improving the life of the community. But there is not sufficient cohesion among them and the opposition party consisting of landlords, money-lenders, quacks and some of the officials of the local bodies (municipality and district board) is still very strong. I had no idea that life in the rural areas of the province was so corrupt and chaotic. However, I must hope for the best. If the school goes on and the medical aid to the poor is continued, I shall be satisfied.

I came here to test some of the principles underlying a scheme for reviving Bengal rural life. It is gratifying to think that a band of young men has found the work interesting and that we have had some insight into this most difficult problem. The experience gained here confirmed my conviction that there was no hope for

any success with any form of democratic constitution if the village units were not made living entities. Our politicians tell us that India's primary task is to wrest power from an alien government and that once we succeed in doing so, it will be easy for us to rehabilitate rural life. Well, perhaps. But how on earth are you going to succeed in your struggle with the Government without having exorcised the evils that lurk in the village communities torn into fragments by internal dissensions and the external circumstances of poverty, illiteracy and ill-health ? The primary task before us is the economic and social regeneration of the country ; and once we get rid of some of the peculiar characteristics of medievalism that disfigure our social life, we shall have evolved such conditions for political freedom that even the die-hards will find our claims irresistible.

But I was not going to discuss politics with you. It is difficult to say how one should build up a rural reconstruction centre in an area where you are not likely to get any support from local bodies ; but it is my firm belief that they cannot stand aside for long and that by your sincere devotion to the people you will eventually succeed in overcoming all opposition from rural plutocrats. Didn't we here have trouble with these intermediaries big and small between the Government and the people ! To these our latest addition is a class of professional politicians. We will soon see them carrying on a brisk trade with that commodity known as franchise.

Never mind them—go on with your work depending on the people themselves. Their confidence is your main asset and once you bridge the gulf between you and them, your mission will be half accomplished. The tragedy of our life is that we do not even know the bulk of the rural population. The object of your rural centre should be to find a way out of this situation and I am confident that you will easily make your way into the heart of your villagers.

67

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Ramanathapuram,
Madras Presidency
(1926)

From my Journal.

The Young Men's Christian Association opened a number of rural welfare centres, somewhat on the lines I planned for the *Karmi Sangha* in the village of Behala. The inspiring genius behind the six centres in the Presidency of Madras is my friend, K. T. Paul. One of these centres is near Coimbatore, and some of us were eager to see the methods adopted there.

The village is situated on the outskirts of the municipal limits of Coimbatore. The Secretary of the organization explained to us some of its activities and gave us an exhibition of the various products of the cottage industries which might be established as a subsidiary occupation of the villagers. Poultry-farming, dyeing and printing of cloth were some of the industries which were taught in the centre, and some of them were on the whole successful. The method of teaching was to select an intelligent man from the village and attach him as an apprentice to an expert. There was also a small demonstration farm attached to this organization and I should say that this small plot of seven acres was the centre of attraction to many villagers in the neighbourhood. The villagers within a radius of seven to ten miles were served by this centre. In every village there was a school for children and a night school for adults. In every village there was a co-operative society and the centre took the initiative in organizing credit, joint purchase or joint sale societies. A bold attempt was being

made to save the village from the evils of litigation by establishing a panchayat. During the time of our visit a number of villagers were present in this centre, and from the attitude of the villagers towards the social workers, and from the attitude of the social workers to them, I could see where lay the success of such an enterprise.

This centre also provided a very important organization for the co-ordination of activities of a number of departments of the Government. The lesson to be derived from this was that the task of rural uplift must be organized in co-operation with the Government departments, and that the problem must be faced as a whole. Co-ordinated effort would ensure an efficient service, and also its continuity. I should think that lack of continuity is one of the root causes of our failure in creating *live* centres of rural welfare.

The Secretary took us to a neighbouring village where we could have a glimpse of the life of the depressed classes. We passed through the dirty village lanes and within a short time, men, women, and children, all gathered around us. What a spectacle to look at! One begins to doubt whether God made man after His image. The sight of these people, especially the children, depressed me. To reflecting minds the problem of these backward communities in India is sufficiently serious, and should be faced boldly. I wonder why these people do not rebel against social tyranny, which, in the main, is responsible for their abject condition. Surely this state of affairs cannot remain unchanged, and discontent will soon spread even among these backward communities. So I think the Hindu orthodox community should take a warning in time.

On our way back to the Y.M.C.A. Centre, the Secretary explained to us one or two features of their work which should be mentioned here. The scheme

of mass-education adopted by the social workers belonging to this centre was as follows:

It is true that weekly markets offered an excellent educational opportunity, and therefore most of the markets within a radius of five or ten miles from the centre are regularly visited by them. Periodically the social workers bring to these markets such wares as may be required by the villagers, and take this opportunity to exhibit improved varieties of crops, manures and all the other things which the Government Departments of Agriculture, Co-operation, Veterinary Science, Industry, Health and Education were eager to demonstrate. This leads to personal contact with the villagers, and once they are convinced of the sincerity of purpose, they are gradually attracted within the orbit of influence of the social welfare centre.

The other means of mass-education is to take advantage of the time-honoured custom of getting up quasi-dramatic performances. The open air theatres are a popular resort of the villagers, and there the village lads, who are themselves illiterate, would perform little plays based on epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The social workers freely associate themselves with these lads and introduce in their performance modern topics such as the 'mosquito and malaria', 'the money-lender and the mortgager', and so on.

The Secretary, Mr. Jayakaran, lived in the village itself, and had succeeded in attracting a number of educated young men to assist him in this work of rural reconstruction. He repeated to me that the secret of success was to convince the villagers that there was an identity of interest between them and the social workers.

The Y.M.C.A. spends annually about £900 on this centre.

68

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Coimbatore, Madras
(1926)

To a Social Service worker.

I am delighted to hear that your organization hopes to take its part in economic field work in India. A beginning has been made in that direction; Dr. Mann's study of a village near Poona; Dr. Slater's investigation of six South Indian villages; Dr. Saunders' study of a village near Madura, and a series of enquiries by the Punjab Board of Economics, have shown the way. But a great deal has yet to be done in analysing concrete facts for a correct diagnosis of all the symptoms of Indian rural life. Work out a system of collecting accurate data in regard to the Ryot's budget, cost of cultivation, and a host of other relevant data. Can you not collect a number of typical family budgets of your villagers and have the figures carefully analysed and interpreted? It would be a very useful study.

Two definite conclusions at which you have arrived, namely: (1) 'more and more people are becoming non-cultivating landowners and tenants', (2) 'holdings are becoming smaller', are in agreement with what I myself have so far discovered. But these should be amply supported by authentic data.

I cannot offer any definite suggestion at the present moment, but one thing I want you to remember: co-operation with the State Departments, i.e. Agriculture, Co-operation, Education, etc., is necessary. Our voluntary organizations must not stand isolated. This isolation is paraded as being 'national' in character, but I believe that our task is to blend the State and the people into one.

My second suggestion is that you must do all you can to bring your co-workers closer to the life of the

community. It is the only way of gaining the confidence of the village folk—and from confidence, you will be blessed with their friendship. Do not worry about the ' despotism of the priest '. With the awakening of popular intelligence, there would arise the spirit of revolt against the worn-out ritualistic sectarianism. Only be on your guard against the virus of communal strife.

I think it is a splendid idea to elect the village elder as your chief.

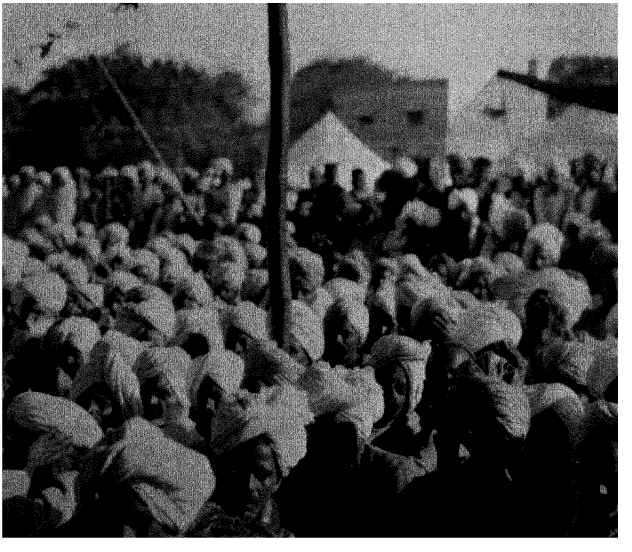
69

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Gurgaon,
Punjab
(1928)

From my Journal.

The improvement of the conditions of rural life brought about in some of the villages of the district through the persistent efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Brayne illustrates the interdependence of the three factors mentioned in Sir Horace Plunkett's familiar slogan, ' Better Business, Better Farming and Better Living '. But the main concern of the village uplift movement in Gurgaon has been to arouse among the people the will to ' better living '. Thus the essence of the problem is psychological and Mr. Brayne's scheme for rural reconstruction is to make a direct and organized attack on the factors that inhibit the desire for the better things of the world. Mr. Brayne is of the opinion that the gospel of better living should precede, or at least be linked with the propaganda for better farming and better business. There are rural workers in India who consider that better living can come only as a result of improved agricultural and well organized marketing facilities. The truth lies in the fact that the Indian peasant is struggling in a vicious circle.

ONE OF MR. F. L. BRAYNE'S VILLAGE SINGING PARTIES



MEETING OF MEMBERS OF CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY, SONEPAT, PUNJAB

[*face page* 155

The will to live better cannot be a dominant force unless poverty and ignorance are partially removed. Be that as it may, we were greatly impressed with what we saw and we learned a great deal from Mr. Brayne's successes attained after six years persistent efforts.

The Gurgaon district is described in the official documents as being insecure, that is, the people are liable to periodical invasion of famine. The chief cause of its insecurity is the lack of irrigation facilities ; but considerable progress has been made since the opening of the Agra canal. The agriculture of the district is dependent on rains and well irrigation ; but if the water level sinks below the depth of 34 to 40 feet, the cost of lifting water from wells becomes uneconomic. Mr. Brayne has introduced in the district a special type of Persian wheel which requires less power to lift water.

Our visit was to the village of Meola Maharajpur. On entering the village we were met by one of the singing parties known as *chaupais*. Mr. Brayne has made use of this institution and these minstrels will now sing songs composed under instructions from Mr. Brayne which contain the message of rural uplift. Most of the population of the village consisted of Guzars. The average proprietary holding of cultivated land is about 8·5 acres; but the chief difficulty is the absence of irrigation facilities. Out of 887 acres of cultivated land about 24 acres are served by well irrigation. Thus the bulk of the crops depends on rains. There is a primary school in the village and the villagers have agreed to the system of compulsion. There are about sixty boys and twenty girls enrolled in the primary school. As a result of intensive propaganda by Mr. Brayne the making of dung cake has been greatly restricted and for only three months in the year are villagers permitted to make use of cow dung as fuel. The village is kept very clean, and on the whole the villagers enjoy good health. But I am

not sure whether in the absence of any subsidiary occupation their economic condition has improved to any extent. The precarious agriculture cannot maintain the population of the village. A number of Guzars have returned from military service and some of the other villagers make a living by working as labourers.

From here we passed on to the next village where the majority of the population are Jats and the average proprietary holding of the cultivated land is about 5·5 acres. Here again the cultivation depends on rain and out of 2,346 acres only 73 acres are irrigated by wells. The difference between this village and the one first visited lies in the fact that the Jats are admirable cultivators and that some of them have taken to cattle-breeding. The Jat villages are undoubtedly more prosperous than the other ones, and I dare say the prosperity is also due to the Jat women who are very industrious and spare no efforts to explore all avenues of supplementing the income of the family. We saw a flour mill in the village and were informed that in one or two families hand-weaving had been introduced. It was a matter of great satisfaction to us that the villagers were persuaded to introduce the system of compulsory education. The outstanding fact about the success attained in this village is that Mr. Brayne is the Deputy Commissioner of the district. The Rural Community Council which has been recently formed has received the necessary guidance from Mr. Brayne who is also its energetic president. He is again the president of the District Board and has been able to spend from 1st April 1927 to 31st January 1928 the sum of Rs. 95,296 (£7,147) for what is known as rural uplift propaganda.

The activities of the Rural Community Council deserve to be noted here. It organizes a health exhibition and agricultural shows and has recently been provided with a touring car fitted with a magic

lantern. The main agents through whom propaganda work is carried on are village guides. There are at present thirty-seven village guides working in the district, and six supervisors, one in each Tahsil. The activities of these agents may be judged from the fact that over 2,000 lectures have been delivered by them in the course of one year. This idea of organizing village guides should be of considerable interest to those who are interested in rural uplift. In most of the villages in India there is hardly a single individual to whom the villagers can turn in their difficulties. The departments, such as Agriculture, Veterinary, Co-operation, Education and Public Health, send out their agents to the villages. But these peripatetic visitors cannot establish a personal relationship with the villagers. Besides, the multiplicity of agents confuses the illiterate cultivator and taking the line of least resistance he avoids rather than seeks their help.

In Europe and also in America the same difficulty arises and in some of these countries they have set an example of providing county representatives to whom the cultivator may go for help and guidance. We have for example the *konsulent* of Denmark, the *konsulenten* of Belgium and the *wanderlehrer* of Germany. All these agents perform the same task as Mr. Brayne expects his village guides to do. But the difficulty lies in training these agents. A number of students have been already trained; but, I think, the system of teaching has to be greatly improved if the services of these agents are to be really efficient. However, the work is still in the experimental stage and Mr. Brayne deserves every support, from Government and the people. I should record here a secret of Mr. Brayne's success—he has found an enthusiastic supporter of his scheme in Mrs. Brayne. She told us that her work among the village women had been astonishingly successful. Within a short time, the

traditional prejudice against education of girls has been almost completely broken down, and in some of the villages, people were anxious to assist in every way they could the uplift of their women folk. So the eternal criticism against the conservatism of the Indian peasant and his obstinate disinclination to accept fresh ideas proved to be a myth.

One word about the cleanliness of the village. In restricting the use of cow dung and in insistence upon the preservation of village refuse, Mr. Brayne has only attempted to prevent one of the numerous sources of waste. But he could not have achieved this without some form of compulsion. It is the experience of rural workers that the tradition of corporate labour, a well-known feature of village communities in India, is now gradually dying out. The village *panchayats*, where they do exist, do not exert the influence so necessary for any work of rural reconstruction. Neither the village *panchayats*, nor the local bodies, have any power to compel a villager to give his labour for the benefit of the community. One should not be taken aback by the suggestion of compulsory labour. I know of many instances in western Bengal where the villagers could not be induced to work for either road making or cleaning tanks, even when rural workers offered payment. I do not think that the idea of using compulsory labour for the benefit of the entire village community on payment of remuneration is repugnant to the spirit of 'democracy'. I am convinced that a state or such bodies as may be invested with executive powers would be entirely justified in utilizing under conscription the labour of a person who is too lazy to render any service to the State or community. The State enforces payment of taxes when the taxpayer does not pay them voluntarily; and labour is one of the factors of production as much as land. The State can compulsorily take land on payment of compensation. Why not then let

the State take labour compulsorily, when the labourer is not willing to give it voluntarily.

The impression left on my mind by this visit to the Gurgaon district is that the head of a district can render very valuable service by taking the initiative in a movement which has already earned for Mr. Brayne a reputation which he deserves. His frontal attack on ignorance, tradition and even custom, shows that Government has no fear of creating any discontent, if the villagers are convinced that the movement is essentially for their own benefit. Awaken the intelligence of the villagers, teach the illiterate how to think and act for themselves, and you lay the foundation of village uplift.

70

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Mahabaleswar
(1928)

To a colleague in the University of Calcutta.

It is difficult to say what action the Government may take to implement our recommendations. While on the Government rests the responsibility of taking the initiative for rebuilding rural India, I think that the educated section of the population cannot just sit comfortably and keep their gaze fixed on Delhi and Simla. I hope several non-official agencies will come into being to undertake this great task of modernizing our countryside ; and in the creation of these agencies, the Indian universities have a special responsibility. At an interview in Rangoon I said to the Press that by training a band of young men in the work of rural reconstruction the University will foster the spirit of nationalism. It is my conviction that ' there can be no effective work in the direction of rural betterment unless science, education, and administration

join hands in active co-operation. Through the interaction of these agencies the country will be prepared for such constitutional development as we aim at.' And these words irritated the nationalist Press!

But that does not matter. I would only beg you to bear this in mind that a group of, say, ten young men may be selected from post-graduate students for the specific purpose of having them trained in the task of rural reconstruction. Let the University of Calcutta set an example how 'the advancement of learning' may be associated with the task of the advancement of the illiterate millions. Let us reorganize the teaching of economics and sociology. What is known as Faculty of Agriculture may grow out of all these activities. Research is of course necessary but it can only be effective in its application if and when some of the fatal deficiencies in rural economics are removed by organizing the villagers in every possible direction. The key to rural progress is not so much agricultural research but *organization*. We have already gained a considerable knowledge in scientific aspects of Indian Agriculture, but the process of transferring knowledge from the Research laboratories to the actual practice of farming is practically blocked. I would therefore ask the University to think of agriculture in terms of rural reconstruction. And for this we need not wait wistfully for a little mercy from the Bengal Secretariat! Incidentally I may mention that there is no chance of getting a substantial grant from the Government for agricultural research and teaching in the University of Calcutta. Dacca has their favour and there is already a research Institute at Ramna.

We have to rely on our own resources. If we could plan out a scheme under which Tagore's Rural Reconstruction Institute at Surul, a portion of the Government Farm at Chinsurah, the co-operative institutions at Gosaba and many other isolated rural organizations

could be co-ordinated, if we could achieve this, I am sure we shall have made a good beginning. But who is our leader in the University to whom one may look for guidance and inspiration ?

71

Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1929)

To a Social Service worker.

A week among the unsophisticated rural folks has been a great relief to me. But something (perhaps indefinable) has happened in the outlook of ' rural notabilities ' that is irritating me. The associated life of the village communities is almost destroyed and hence this demoralization throughout the social and economic relations between them.

But I also see hopeful signs. While the political groups are seeking for new methods of agitation (non-co-operation, civil disobedience, etc.), there is a growing conviction among a section of our educated youth that the problem has to be solved by reorganizing the social and economic structure in a new way.

I am happy to know that you are studying the co-operative organizations of India. Do not confine yourself only to ' blue books '. It would be of immense help to you in understanding the problems of co-operation if you would arrange a visit to a number of primary societies.

The true value of co-operation lies in the proper appreciation of that strong associative *instinct* still prevalent among rural folk. They are not unfamiliar with co-operation as a means of bringing economic justice to themselves. What is necessary is an organization suitable to modern conditions of economic life. The type of the organization would vary in accordance with ' regional factors '. In Bengal, the Government directed the movement towards the

provision of credit facilities ; but the time has come for expanding the co-operative movement in the direction of agricultural production and marketing of farm products.

But all is not well even with our co-operative credit societies—there are about nineteen thousand of them in Bengal. The popular cry from the critics of the Government is that the number of societies should be increased and more working capital employed in order to provide short-term credit for the cultivator. But, what is the use of expansion until the existing societies become 'living' and the movement develops into people's movement. And that is possible only when it is dependent upon people's initiative rather than the official patronage.

There are two Acts—the Land Improvement Loans Act (1883) and the Agriculturists' Loans Act (1884)—on the Statute Book which enable the Provincial Governments to lend money to agriculturists in emergency. Look up the Report of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture for the nature and extent of benefit derived from these legislative measures. Not much, one must admit.

. . .

In setting up any organization for rural India, we should aim at 'reconstructing' the mind of the villagers. Unless that is achieved, co-operative credit societies will merely function as organized money-lending bodies. The greatest obstacle we will have to face is the deadly inertia of the masses, and this is so demoralizing. A *live* co-operative movement should be able to shake it off, should make the improvident thrifty, the irresponsible careful, and the dishonest honest. Our slogan should therefore be : 'All for each and each for all.' The key to rural reconstruction lies in the hands of co-operative organizers at whose guidance and enthusiasm the true co-operative spirit may be instilled into the countryside. The objective

is not in the promotion of a number of small material advantages, but in the understanding of the principles and ideals of united action.

72

Ballygunj (Bengal)
(1929)

To a Bengal politician.

Although I find myself unable to share your faith in the predominant gospel of the Congress, it has been a source of real satisfaction to me to know that you have recently been giving much thought to the problem of unemployed youth in Bengal. M—— told me that you have been working out a scheme for an agricultural colonization. Admirable, but it is difficult to attract this class of *bhadrolog* youth to agricultural pursuits. One should, however, recognize their difficulties—largely economic and partly psychological. In the past, holdings allotted have generally been too small to guarantee reasonable profits and no provision was made for spare-time occupations for the settlers. I believe the idea of individual farming has to be abandoned and an organization based on co-operative principles substituted. This organization must include each and every part of agricultural industry, that is from production to distribution. As regards the necessary finance, I hope you will be able to interest some of the Indian Insurance Companies. The secret of success in colonization schemes lies in the efficiency of organization and the quality of settlers selected. The choice of a suitable region is another matter to which you must devote considerable attention. Please do not overlook the importance of proximity of markets for farm produce. A recent proposal for finding employment for middle-class youth in agricultural pursuits came from Mr. Burrows, the District Magistrate of Faridpur. You

may be familiar with the details of his scheme, which Government has sanctioned ; but I may state here its main features.

(1) One year's training in practical agriculture at the Government Agricultural Farm, Faridpur. The syllabus includes agricultural carpentry, elementary veterinary and principles of Co-operative Credit.

(2) The pupils are required to work as labourers in the Government Agricultural Farm and will be paid Rs. 12 per month. Free accommodation will be provided for pupils.

(3) After the year's training, each pupil will receive a provisional settlement of a 15 *bigha* (i.e. about 5 acres) plot of *Khas Mahal* land, free of rent for three years.

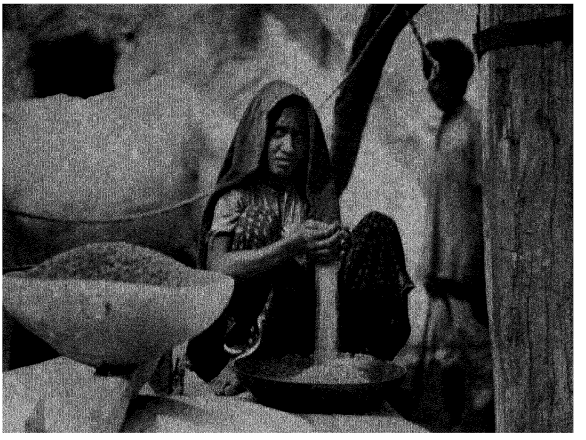
(4) Under the Land Improvement or Agricultural Loans Act, each settler will be given a loan of Rs. 200 (£15) at the usual interest. This amount would be recovered in four annual instalments commencing from the second year after the money is advanced.

(5) The work done on the land will be inspected every half-year by the District Agricultural officer and any attempt to let out the land, which would be contrary to the interests of the settlement, will involve immediate cancellation of the provisional settlement.

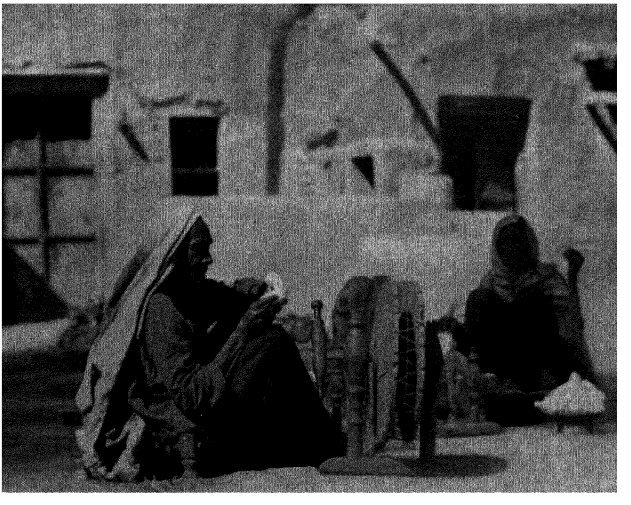
(6) At the end of the three years and on the report of a satisfactory progress, an ordinary ryotwari settlement will be made on the usual terms.

(7) Preference will be given to the inhabitants of Faridpur.

The scheme will begin with five pupils belonging to the middle class unemployed! I wish the scheme success. Anyhow, even if it were partially successful, the great problem of agricultural colonization would remain unsolved. I had hoped that the University might be persuaded to take a lead in such an urgent question, but there is no one on the present syndicate of the University on whom you may rely for getting anything accomplished. . . .



PEASANT WOMAN MEASURING WHEAT



WOMAN WITH SPINNING WHEEL (Charka)

[*face page* 165

that is, increased pressure on land, (2) glaring discrepancies existing in social life between various classes, (3) contentment of the masses with low standards in life.

The census of 1931 is under preparation. According to the last census (1921) the total population was about 319 millions. The next census will probably show an increase of about 40 millions; and this within the borders of a country with an area of about half that of the United States! In certain parts of Bengal, the density has increased; it was 608 in 1921.

You realize what it means to have this high density in a purely agricultural tract. Half a century ago the Famine Commission (1880) observed that 'at the root of much of the poverty of the people of India and of the risks to which they are exposed . . . lies the unfortunate circumstances that agriculture forms almost the sole occupation of the masses of the population'. I should mention here that the high birth-rate is mainly due to our social sanctions and religious customs; and the high death-rate largely to poverty. The religion of the Hindus does not favour celibacy. Every Hindu 'must marry and beget children—sons if you please—to perform his funeral rites lest his spirit should wander uneasily in the vacant places of the earth', writes Wattal in his interesting brochure—*The Population Problem in India*. All girls specially belonging to so-called high castes, are married *before puberty*. The Indian Legislature have recently passed the Child Marriage Act, fixing the age of marriage for girls at fourteen. We all welcome this belated Act of the Legislature; but it will take some time before the Hindu outlook on child marriage undergoes a real change.

The second factor, mentioned above, has already attracted your attention. The root of the trouble here, I believe, is the rigidity and the multiplicity of the caste system. Every social reformer, since the days

in villages where the shadow of death and want is daily growing deeper'. That is why he founded the Institute of Rural Reconstruction as an integral part of his International University (*Viswa Bharati*). But if the Institute does not receive liberal support from the State and the people, its progress, I fear, will be greatly hampered.

Yes, the experimental plots are well laid out; and by organizing an irrigational system, the success of the experiments is ensured. I do not think sugar-cane will do well in this region, but the most hopeful venture in Surul Farm is the attempt to grow fodder crops. In view of the poor nutritional value of the diet of our people the cultivation of vegetables, not for the market, but their own use, would be of great benefit. Agricultural production in India cannot be thought of only in terms of cash or profits.

Certainly, agricultural production may be increased by the use of farm machinery. Ford once announced that he obtained the best yield from his lands by working on them only fifteen days in the year! In your country, the number of persons employed in agricultural pursuits is reduced but production has increased.

But, under the existing rural economy and land system, we do not see how agricultural machinery can be extensively used. Besides, what can we do with those tillers of soil released through the employment of tractors, seed-drillers and harvesters? Industrialized agriculture may come with the proper development of industries in India. Our immediate problem is to adjust farming to the circumstances of the commercial world, into whose orbit we are drawn 'unprepared'. We are in the midst of what is described as 'a sudden transition from local to international economy'.

In understanding the problems of Indian masses and their conditions of life we have to bear in mind *three* fundamental factors: viz. (1) increase of population,

that is, increased pressure on land, (2) glaring discrepancies existing in social life between various classes, (3) contentment of the masses with low standards in life.

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of Raja Rammohan Roy, regarded this as an obstructive institution in the path of our social, moral and material progress ; it remains as an instrument of social tyranny instead of being means of adjustment between and among heterogeneous groups that exist in India; it is indeed one of the formidable obstacles to rural reconstruction. The village elders still sing the praise of the caste system and fail to see how its perpetuation militates against solidarity. Even among the Hindu revivalists or ultra-nationalists, you hear eulogies of a system that stands in the way of attaining nationhood !

As regards the outlook of the villagers, it springs, I believe, largely from the depressing conditions of existence. The fetters of custom, the tyranny of priestcraft and crass ignorance have all combined to produce what you see today among the bulk of our millions. Whenever I reflect on these circumstances, I feel that India's greatest need now is a social revolution. If Gandhi hadn't become a political Messiah, he could probably have been a great social reformer.

I am glad you are now proceeding to the Punjab. There you will find perhaps the most picturesque and hardy peasantry of India ; you will also see the largest canal system in the world. Irrigation has changed the entire character of the Province ; the areas once on the verge of acute scarcity are now the centres of large grain markets.

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Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1931)

To the Editor of the *Statesman*.[1]

The two articles on ' Back to the Land ' published in the columns of the *Statesman* recently, and your editorial comments thereon, have a practical social

[1] *The Statesman*, 17th March 1931. A daily newspaper published in Calcutta.

and economic bearing on the present circumstances in India which cannot be over-estimated. 'Back to the Land' is undoubtedly a workable solution of the huge problem of unemployment which, in ever-increasing proportions, is facing our country today.

The difficulty of overcoming an undue sense of self-respect in order to push through any scheme based on the idea of 'Back to the Land' has been stated with unerring precision and correctness; but how this may be overcome has not been even remotely suggested. I should like to point out in this connexion that the Congress is now faced with the rather unpleasant task of disbanding a vast army of volunteers recruited for the civil disobedience campaign, and that this is an army constituted of material which, through a course of unmitigated suffering during the last year, has been trained to ideals of selflessness, patience, perseverance and fortitude in the face of miseries, and above all, to ideals of national and social service. That a major portion of this material comes from the educated middle classes is highly creditable, though the set purpose for which it has been utilized has been unfortunate; but the qualities and principles which it represents may be used, in times like this of peaceful constructive work, with advantage both by the Congress and the Government in mutual co-operation.

This band of young men, if properly utilized for constructive service, will supply the finest material for pioneering work in any scheme based on the idea of 'Back to the Land' as a solution for the problem of unemployment. For my part, I would employ these young men not only for the social and economic value which they possess, but also as a means of avoiding an extremely dangerous situation which would soon be created by keeping idle not less than fifty thousand young men, trained to defy law and order. If the problem of disbanding an army after a period of war service is difficult, the problem of disbanding

the army of civil disobedience is still more difficult because of the difference in discipline.

On the model of the Colonization schemes already set afoot in Mysore and Travancore, I would like to see a colonization scheme on a comprehensive scale, prepared by the Government of India, and brought into operation through the various provincial governments in their respective areas. Colonization schemes are not new to British India, nor is the success which would attend such schemes a matter for serious doubt, as we have a most successful colonization scheme in the canal colonies of the Punjab. A Committee of officials and a few expert non-officials thoroughly acquainted with rural questions in India, and one or two representatives of Universities well versed in rural and agricultural problems, might be appointed by the Central Government and asked to report on the possibilities of a comprehensive colonization scheme as a solution to the unemployment problem in India. I am indeed aware of the unemployment committees and their reports in some of the provinces; I am also aware that the amount of their success has not been very encouraging to the appointment of new committees. But it has to be remembered that by the very nature of these various committees and their investigations, they were bound to fail, inasmuch as they had been constituted on a provincial basis while the problem of unemployment was an all-India one, and inasmuch as their investigations had been so wide in scope as to make it unlikely that they would find and advocate a specific remedy. I propose an investigation of the problem from an all-India basis and on a specific issue, such as a scheme of colonization, and I have the greatest hope that the possibilities of such a scheme are far more than at present can be foreseen. But what I would like to emphasize in any scheme that may be prepared is the necessity of recognizing the vast disbanded army of the Congress

as a highly valuable social and economic factor in creating a good example for the youths of the country to follow, and as a deeply dangerous element to society if they are allowed to remain unemployed. What I would like to emphasize as a second point is the necessity for looking at the problem as an all-India one in the same manner as co-operation was looked at in the beginning of that movement, which primarily accounts for its initial successes. But in all these matters finance might be pleaded as an insurmountable obstruction. I may, however, assure the Government that these things would cost them something less than it would cost to keep these men in goal and to fight non-co-operation and civil disobedience.

Chapter V

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE MASSES

75

Adyar (Madras)
(1918)

To an Indian politician (Madras).

. . . In formulating proposals for representative and responsible Government in India I hope you will remember the urgent need for remedying the deficiencies in the administration of local bodies. The structure of the Constitution under the reforms must be raised on the foundation of local self-government, and if you fail here you will never succeed in investing your constitution with even a semblance of democracy. I am not a politician but the study of the problems of agricultural development in India has led me to the conclusion that substantial progress in rehabilitating rural life is possible only when you help the rural population to organize themselves. The modern movement in agriculture is characterized by the development of well-organized local *units*. Once such units become living and begin to function, the community tends to become unified under the forces that arise from common interests.

The constitution of our Society in a village or a town was autonomous and to a great extent republican. Our rulers in the past lived on the resources of the people, levied taxes and waged war on each other at pleasure, but they left the internal management of affairs to the village communities. I would like you to obtain a copy of Maine's *Village Communities*. There you will see what were the rights of these

communities and how they have been so completely absorbed by the centralized government. Ever since the powers and obligations of the local bodies have been arrogated by the Central Government to itself, these bodies have lost their vitality. At one time, so the historians tell us, our villages were well organized and consequently functioned as living 'units'. That is not so now, although the frame of that corporate life is still discernible.

'The Mandals, the head *ryots* are rapidly losing their influence. The causes of decline of this as well as all other old village institutions are, first, the systematic neglect of such agencies by the Government; second, the growing number of the Zemindars; and third, the declining need of such agencies occasioned by the introduction of a regular police, strong government . . .' wrote Hunter in the Statistical Account of Bengal.

An example of municipal administration in Ancient India is furnished by Vincent Smith in his *Early History of India*. He writes: 'The administration of the capital city, Pataliputra, was provided for by the formation of a municipal commission, consisting of thirty members, divided, like the war office commission of equal members into six Boards or Committees of five members each. These boards may be regarded as an official development of the ordinary non-official panchayat, or a committee of five members, by which every caste and trade in India has been accustomed to regulate its internal affairs from time immemorial.'

The panchayat system still survives, especially among the bulk of the lower castes. P—— took me to see a Santal village near Bolpur and there we found ourselves in the midst of a meeting of the panchayat. Thank God, these people do not rush to the Courts of Justice, but they settle their quarrels and differences at a committee of the Panchayat. They call this 'arbitration of the Brotherhood'. Such familiar

modes of parochial justice have now been replaced by the elaborate system of court proceedings.

Last night T.S. asked a friend of his—a scholar—to dinner. He gave me an illuminating recital of certain features of local self-government as these existed in Southern India. According to him, it is an erroneous idea that the Indian monarchs ruled by mere centralized autocracy. In support of his view that village institutions were administered by panchayats, he read out to me a translation of some inscriptions of a Chola king, A.D. 907. I enquired if the Central administration had any powers over these bodies. He replied saying the villages enjoyed administrative and judicial powers but under the supervision of the crown officials. It is this problem of control, superintendence and advice by the Government that today raises a host of difficulties in the development of local Self-Government in India.

In any case for the next ten years I would want a free hand in reconstructing the entire organization of local Self-Government. From this stage, I believe, provincial autonomy will be of easy reach.

B—— ridicules such a suggestion; for he thinks that Swaraj cannot be attained piece-meal, that it embraces a comprehensive conception of National Government, that India will never have these post-war advantages for striking a bargain with the Imperial Government and so on.

. . . I had a very inspiring interview with Mrs. Besant. She appears to be in agreement with the views expressed in regard to local self-government. We also discussed her plans for an agriculture college here. Already there is a farm and necessary laboratories for investigations and with these facilities it is possible to establish a National Agriculture College, not so much for research, but for attracting our unemployed youth to take to agricultural pursuits. Agriculture has lost its scope, dignity and attractiveness owing to

backwardness of the industry in India. If we can indicate the way to its progress I believe our young men will take to farming as an occupation.

76

Rajshahi (Bengal)
(1926)

To a Moslem friend.

Before leaving Calcutta, where the already smoke-laden atmosphere is vitiated with the foul gas of communal strife, I received your letter. Your questions are pertinent and I am glad I visited a number of villages in this neighbourhood before answering them.

There is no *real* Hindu-Moslem antagonism in the villages. Here both the communities live side by side; their interests as primary producers are identical; in their daily life, they come in contact with each other as members of an organic and homogenous economic system. Their collective dispositions and aspirations arise from the common occupation of soil-tillers. Indeed, the wide tolerance which characterizes our cultivating classes should be an object lesson to our 'leaders'.

But I am afraid our rural folk will not be kept immune from the epidemic of Communalism. The leaders of both the communities are demanding a system of communal electorates and representation. Once they allow the system to permeate the whole structure of public bodies, from the village union to the Legislative Assembly, our political progress will be greatly hampered. In this game of politics the *religion* of the voter not so much his economic interest will come into prominence.

I am sceptical about success in arresting this development in rural life. Remember our countryside is without leadership and dark with illiteracy and

ignorance. Some of the promising elements of progress found among the peasantry arise from their simple religious outlook which does not emphasis differences among the communities. To them, religion is an expression of practical piety. In one of the villages I found the Hindus joining the Moslems in honouring the shrine of a moslem *pir* (saint).

The population of this district is largely Moslems—about 77 per cent ; the observation of the settlement officer in regard to Hindu-Moslem feeling confirms what impression I have gathered from my visits in this district. Mr. Nelson writes : 'Hindus and Mohammedans live in amity together. The Mohammedans bear traces of their Hindu origin. They take an interest even an active part in Hindu festivals and *pujas*. Hindus send offerings to *dargas* and Mohammedans sacrifice goats to *Kali*. Names of Mohammedans are not always distinctly Mohammedan.'

But all these elements of cohesion and synthesis will be of no avail once you accept the principle of representation on the basis of race or religion. Do you honestly believe that the interests of a Moslem cultivator are distinguishable from those of his Hindu colleague ? When the Minto-Morley reforms came to us, our political leaders should have opposed the principle of representation by classes and interests. It is this fatal defect in the Constitution that militates against the required adjustment of interests leading to unity of action. Never before has there been so acute a divergence of interest, for instance, between the landholders and tenants as exists today. During the last survey and settlement operations, the number of disputes between them was about 70 per cent of the total cases. The mischief lies, of course, in the system of land tenure which has to be modified substantially in the interest of the Bengal peasantry.

But, I fear in the midst of our political controversies their economic interests may not arrest our attention

in a manner warranted by the conditions under which the bulk of the peasantry lives.

You say that the Royal Agricultural Commission will only produce a library of blue-books which will be shelved in the archives of the Government of India. But I cannot be so pessimistic. I remember reading Lord Rosebery's definition of the State: 'A state is in essence a great joint-stock company with unlimited liability on the part of its shareholders.' The Royal Agricultural Commission will at least take stock of this business of Agriculture as it affects the bulk of our population. As regards taking action on such recommendations as may be made by this body, the responsibility will largely rest on public opinion.

In any case, our constitution-makers should be better acquainted with the conditions of life of the peasantry. The peasantry lies at the bottom of the social and economic scale; between the vast mass of our peasantry and the Government, there is a layer of educated and propertied classes; and it is this layer that has no intimate contact with the people. Thus, the civilizing and vitalizing movements do not penetrate down to the masses. And, since the State appears to be concerned with those who are vocal and demand protection of their rights and privileges, the Indian masses must be organized in order to have their grievances removed. But, who are going to assist them in this task?

During these holidays I have visited a number of villages in this district. While the conditions of life under which the bulk of the rural folks live are depressing, I believe a change has taken place in their outlook. On the surface there is all the appearance of inertia; but the spirit of revolt—thank God—is working among the masses.

The Commission will assemble, I believe, in October. By all means prepare a memorandum and send it to

the secretaries. I can assure you that constructive proposals for the amelioration of our rural folk will receive the closest attention from the Commission.

77

Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture,
Mahabaleswar
(1928)

To an Indian politician.

It is a pity that the Indian Statutory Commission has been sent to India just at the time of the publication of our report. I foresee the risk of the report being shelved by the authorities as their attention must now be engaged upon the political issues. It is repeatedly asserted that once we attain *swaraj*, that is, a complete control of the administrative mechanism, the regeneration of rural life would be our chief concern; we would then enact legislative measures necessary to promote the interests of the masses. My contention is that *swaraj* cannot come to us as long as the social and economic structure of this sub-continent remains as it is today. There is a passage in George Eliot which I noted in my scrap-book: 'No political institution will alter the nature of ignorance, or hinder it from producing vice and misery. Let ignorance start how it will, it must run the same round of low appetites, poverty, slavery and superstition.'

When I insist upon social uplift and economic adjustment, I do not mean that we should just put on a mask of philanthropy in order to make 'experiments with truth'. To my mind, the task before us is to evolve a new programme of life based upon a new synthesis of values. For instance we have lost the true spirit behind our aristocracy, and the reason is to be found in our inability to adjust our past with the present. This lack of unity, of cohesion in the thought-realm reacts on our public enterprise where

one could detect some of the worst forms of psychological aberration. Imagine—co-operating with our excited mob in this communal 'warfare'; listen to ——'s exhortation to rebel *against* modern world-tendencies as means of solving India's modern problems; or follow —— in his blind allegiance to the Government policy; you will, then, appreciate the depth of our mental degradation. The chaos in our environment arises from the conflicts in our mind. I feel modern India has been left without a moral code to guide her destiny. And that is why we look to other countries and consider importing from them codes devised to meet their own needs. Someone would say that India's salvation lies in Communism; others would give Fascism a trial; and there are public men who would swear by Federalism for solution of our difficulties.

Our report is emerging, chapter by chapter, at a reasonable speed, from the volumes of evidence collected, and I believe the document will contain a lot to think about if we wish to rehabilitate the economic life of the bulk of the people. I only hope our Olympian gods will accept the fruits of our labours with grace and will take immediate steps to implement at least some of the essential recommendations. I do not think Lord Irwin will let us down.

78

Berhampur (Ganjam District)
(1930)

To a friend in England.

I am grateful to you for your comments upon the Report of the Agricultural Commission. I still hold the view that our primary need is to offer the agricultural population all facilities for increasing their prosperity, and that the secret of our political impotence lies in the low standard of life of the bulk of our

population. Living in and under the conditions which I see in the villages, I feel that the very soul of their humble inhabitants must have suffered from grave injuries. Extreme poverty is degrading. No people can be loyal and contented who have not the means of decent subsistence. And politicians would always exploit the growlings of the discontented multitude. There the problem of Indian unrest is in a nutshell!

Yes, I think the report of the Agricultural Commission is comprehensive; but I am disappointed at the manner in which it has been handled by the provincial governments. The Government of India has set up the Council of Agricultural Research but its attraction for the provinces may lie in the purse earmarked for doling out grants. It is important that the provincial governments should without delay establish research committees consisting of men who are actually engaged in agricultural investigations. The barriers that exist between the Departments of Agriculture and the Universities, I hope, will now disappear. These provincial research committees may soon grow into Rural Development Boards if public opinion in the provinces takes a *real* interest in the affairs of the committees. For the moment, our public men are far too excited over political constitution-making. All will be well when they run the government!

It is decided that agricultural interests in the Round Table Conference will be represented by the inclusion of a few landlords in the Indian delegation. It is taken for granted that they would safeguard the interests of our peasantry. Well—I am now convinced that the only hope of our peasantry is to organize themselves. You know the proverb: the wheel which has the most squeak gets the most grease. So we whose gaze is not fixed upon Whitehall-Simla, must now divert our energy to the task of making the cultivator articulate. He must learn to demand things he needs; he must know that his destiny lies

with him. It is in this spirit of self-reliance I see a ray of hope of revitalizing rural life. Only then there may be a stir in our legislative chambers and also in the landlords' parlour.

As a matter of fact, this is what has happened elsewhere. In the United States the farmers are so well organized that the Government, Federal or State cannot ignore their demands. They gave the farmers Granges (educational and social organizations), Farm Institutes, the Farmers' Union, County Farm Bureaux, the American Farm Bureau Federation and so on. In their Legislatures and Chambers of Commerce they have a special committee on agricultural matters affecting the welfare of the industry. Soon after the termination of my labour with the Royal Agricultural Commission, I wrote a number of letters to the party leaders in the Assembly and the provincial Councils urging them to set up committees for considering legislative and administrative matters that affect the peasantry. Most of them approved of the proposal but nothing has so far been done!

The attitude of our landholders whom the Government consider as 'the natural leaders' of the peasantry was exemplified by their protest against the recommendation of Indian Statutory Commission in regard to the taxation of agricultural income; and the Government appear to favour the policy of fostering the interests of the privileged classes at the expense of the masses. For instance, the revenue derived from them is used in subsidizing the Tata Iron Works. Whither shall the masses turn?

The extreme politicians, on the other hand, put their faith in some obscure magic of democracy by which they hope to solve the problems of rural life. Gandhi declared that he aimed at 'a poor man's democracy'. What does that mean? The truth is, our public men grossly overrate the importance of constitutional reforms, the structure of which is still

very vague in their own mind. Now that the architects are proceeding to London, you will have opportunities of hearing divergent views and of knowing how premature is this All-India Federation.

79

Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1930)

To a friend in England.

The first volume of the Report of the Statutory Commission contains an admirable summary of the state of affairs in India but I feel that it should have dealt with the economic condition of our 'teeming millions' in greater detail. It devotes, for instance, just a page to the co-operative movement about which the Agricultural Commission observed: 'If co-operation fails there will fail the best hope of rural India.' Then the reference to rural education is also very meagre. But there is, of course, a rhetorical outburst on the Indian *ryot*. 'It is he', says the Report, 'who clears and fertilizes the land. The vernal exuberance in which it is clothed and the landscape views which it wears, arise from his exertions. It is he who supplies the necessaries of life, infuses activity and vigour into commerce and keeps up the vitality of the whole country. His welfare and the welfare of the country are so much linked with each other, that it behoves everyone to interest himself in his cause.'

But the Report bears no definite mark of an understanding of the problems of agrarian India. I have before me an interesting memorandum submitted to the Statutory Commission by the Punjab Zemindars' Association.[1] I shall not burden you with all the

[1] There are twenty-seven districts in the Punjab, and each one of these has a Zemindars' Association. These are federated in the Punjab Zemindars' Association.

questions raised in this document but the main point on which the Association lay so much emphasis should be noted here. The memorandum asserts that ' an immense cleavage exists in India between the trading classes in the cities and towns on the one hand, and the agricultural classes on the other'. Then it goes on to describe how deep is this cleavage. ' This Association would impress on the Statutory Commission with all possible emphasis, that the urban middle-class, which is akin to and includes the money-lending class, has no sympathy with the agricultural classes whatever; and that the interests of the two classes are diametrically opposed to one another. The urban middle-class, with the academical education they have received, look down upon agriculturists as being only good enough to plough land, produce food, supply the revenues, act as cannon fodder and to be exploited in every way conceivable. Although the urban middle-class have recently proposed universal suffrage, it is only to create a huge irresponsible electorate whom in their poverty, ignorance and immense numbers sufficient to swamp all other classes, they expect to be able to keep under their influence. In India the power of the money-lenders is universal and supreme.'

We must hold our patience till the Round Table Conference produces an alternative plan for the future Indian Constitution. But in the composition of this conference one does not find real and adequate representation of the ' man in the field '. Those of us who are eager to protect his interests are told by the Olympian gods that we do not represent him because we are not landowners! It looks as if India is going to have a form of democracy run by a well-to-do oligarchy in the interest of the privileged classes. But will this endure?

80

Ballygunj,
Calcutta
(1931)

To a Congress politician.

. . . I do not for a moment doubt the sincerity of the Congress whose existence during the last fifty years has been a substantial contribution to political awakening; but such an attitude of readiness to recognize the utility of the organization cannot make us ignore the defective aspects of the manner in which it has been functioning during the whole period of its activity. For fifty years the Congress agitated, and the climax of the agitation was reached when Mahatma Gandhi sailed for London to wrest Dominion Status for India from the British Parliament, on the plea that India is fit for working out a system of government modelled on the parliamentary system obtaining in Great Britain. What I regret is the absence of any political programme suitable to the conditions prevailing in India. Do you not discern an unmistakable evidence of the influence of western political thinking on Gandhi? Today we are suffering from the cumulative effect of more than half a century of political agitation by the Congress composed of men inspired by western political idealism and fired by an enthusiasm to imitate but not to adapt with discrimination and discernment. If any one suspects the correctness of my reading of the situation, I need only refer him to the grand galaxy of tragic figures in India's national art gallery. There has never been a political leader in India whose voice was a clarion call to the country in the heyday of his youth and who lived a long life but did not live down his reputation and attempted to undo all that he did in the earlier part of his life. Who can forget the lion of Bengal, Sir Surendranath, who devoted himself to make the Congress what it is

today, being subjected himself later on, in the mellowness of his age, to a silent castigation at the hands of his country for doing what the country never expected him to do; who can again forget the tragic figure of Bepin Chandra Pal whose voice India once heard from the Himalaya to Cape Comorin, but whose screams through the columns of an Anglo-Indian journal at the present moment do not make even a dog stir from the place of its daily slumber. These are, however, leaders who set political India on the wrong scent for over half a century, and we have learnt to ask for political freedom with a parrot-like pertinacity, scarcely aware of the stuff which we are capable of absorbing.

If the political demand has been based from the very beginning on a true perspective of the requirements of the country, neither the political thinking in India nor the attitude of Great Britain towards the question of political reform would have been so disastrously sidetracked as it is now. The result is that we are today weltering in a confusion of ideas from which there seems to be no escape, and anyone who ventures to speak out the truth is immediately branded as a reactionary.

It was, it is, and it will ever be futile for India to copy blindly western political institutions: the West has never claimed them to be the last word in democracy. Every historian of the British constitution recognizes it as a colossal monument of expediency; the American constitution, in spite of paper perfection, manifests glaring defects of amateurish handicrafts; why, for that matter, representative democracy is condemned as totally inadmissible in a really democratic dispensation; what avails it then for leaders of Indian political thinking to hold up western representative institutions as the salvation of India's democracy? Ideal democracy is never a rule of the majority to the exclusion of the minority: it is the realization of the individual in the group, as the higher and ultimate

democracy is the realization of the individual in the absolute. The absolute is nothing but the oneness of the Universe, and for the individual to realize his identity with that highest sphere of democracy, the stepping stone must be provided in a smaller sphere, the unit of which is neither the Nation-state, nor the province, nor other smaller administrative units, but a small group-organization like the village in which there is no provision, because there is no need, for the clash of interests and the growth of minorities. After centuries of experience and experiments with representative democracy, the West is coming to a realization of this phenomenon in ideal democracy.

I have no quarrel with the British administrator in India for his indifferent attitude towards the village communities; but it is impossible to excuse an organization like the Indian National Congress for failing to have before it a scheme of administration for the country which is to be based on democratic life of our villages. No wonder our leaders are bewildered with the complexities involved in introducing a parliamentary form of government in India. (Remember Morley's dictum, ' fur coat in the Deccan '!) They seem ' to stand like the traveller who, on the verge of a great forest sees many paths diverging into the recesses and knows not whither one or the other will lead him '.

It is a basic blunder to think of an administrative system for India in terms of Lord Sankey's federation or the Maharaja of Patiala's confederation; in fact, Indian democracy is indifferent, has always been indifferent in the past and will always be so in the future as to what happens at the top, so long as it is left to shape its destiny in our village communities. Standing on the top of the Kutb Minar,[1] we see under our

[1] One of the finest pillars in the world. Erected about A.D. 1231 and some 240 feet high.

feet the ashes of a dozen empires beginning with the imperial sway of the Pandavas;[1] but the constant changes in the incumbents of the ancient capital did not in the least affect our rural civilization and culture as embedded in our village system, because the imperial powers did not interfere with the heart of Indian democracy so long as the revenues were ungrudgingly paid.

We have to assemble the forces that are inherent in village communities and if these are made to function properly, there you will have the foundation of a stable political government for India.

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Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1931)

To the Editor, *The Pioneer*.[2]

India is shortly attaining a stage in her political evolution which is generally regarded as democratic, inasmuch as it brings to her a constitution with full autonomy in the provinces, and responsible government with safeguards in the centre.

I should think that no one will venture to contend that democracy, above all things is that form of government which would make the greatest approximation to the expression of the will of the people. Taking this ideal as a basis of any democratic constitution that India has had, or can have in the future, we are face to face with the easiest explanation for the failure of every reform scheme of the past, and for the defects which must be avoided in order to ensure a successful working or any reform scheme of the future. I have

[1] According to the tradition preserved in the Mahabharata, Delhi was founded by the Pandava Chief, Yudisthira.

[2] *The Pioneer*, 9th April 1931. A daily newspaper published then in Allahabad and now at Lucknow, United Provinces.

heard it often said that the Montagu-Chelmsfor Reforms have been a success ; but such an evaluatio of their success neglects consideration of the reform *as a whole.*

If the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms as a whole ha been successful, they ought to have made, howeve imperfectly, some approximation to the expressio of the will of the people, and if they had made tha approximation, the next stage which is being cor sidered now would have been a process of peacefu evolution.

The Indian Constitution did not reach its eventua form in the Reform Act of 1919 ; while the Simo Commission, the Round Table Conference, and eve the Indian National Congress, agreeing as they d on the question whether there should be furthe constitutional advance in India, have not made an definite contribution to the ideal of expressing th will of the people through the constitution. This i evident from their very deliberations which do no show anything like a deep appreciation of the rura problem in India. Indian democracy is fundamentall a rural democracy, and the problem of making thi rural democracy express its will through a constitutio modelled on the highly urbanized democracy of th West is a real rural problem.

With the best of safeguarding provisions, politica representation is still imperfect and unsatisfactor in western countries ; and to copy it in India, whic has a distinctly rural democracy, makes the probler of rural India doubly problematical. Unless thi problem is sufficiently recognized, and efficientl handled, extension of the franchise and enlargemen of the legislatures have no meaning, and the mos perfected form of democratic constitution grante to India cannot be an expression of the will of th people, but will only function as a lifeless machin with the help of the fire and water supplied by a

alien or indigenous oligarchy. In such circumstances representative institutions will be of little value, and may turn out to be mere instruments of tyranny and intrigue, and popular election, instead of being a security against mis-government, would become, in the words of John Stuart Mill, an additional wheel in its machinery.

How to make the will of the nation express itself through her political constitution; how to build up the new constitution on the basis of rural India; and how to make the rural vote the true voice of rural opinion—these are questions which must engage the attention of British and Indian statesmen, before the reform scheme can be ultimately framed.

The first essential towards this end is a scheme for making rural political institutions function with greater liveliness than they are now doing, and for deflecting political activity from the wider centres to rural areas.

For this purpose abundant materials are available in the ancient Indian village communities, which, though now in a state of dilapidation and decay, still retain traces of their ancient self in respect of the administrative, economic and social autonomy which they had once enjoyed. All that is required is to bring them back to life, and to infuse a spirit of activity into them by the operation of a Local Self-Government Act in each province. Under such an Act, the village must be the unit of local self-government; the Taluks must be federations of these units; the districts must be federations of the Taluks; and the Province must be federations of the districts. Complete decentralization of powers must be the outstanding policy, while the Department of Local Self-Government must be thoroughly organized under a staff trained in an efficient Local Self-Government Institute for each Province.

The Act must provide sufficient elasticity for the exercise of the powers and jurisdiction of the political

institutions of the villages, and in order to ensure concentration of popular interest on rural areas, it must be specifically provided that capacity for membership of every other larger representative institution, including the provincial and federal legislatures, must be conditioned upon membership of a village institution, which will supply a strong safeguard against the modern tendency for a candidate to represent a village in the Central Legislature, when he has actually no intimate acquaintance with that village.

On the basis of this scheme, the method of election should be direct only so far as the Village Council is concerned. Here the power to vote must be so far extended as to approximate to adult suffrage, and the jurisdiction and administrative powers of the Village Council must be so conceived and constructed as to be subjected to no *a priori* limitations.

The Taluk which is the next higher unit in the scheme —comprising a number of villages and constituting them into a federation—should have its elective bodies chosen by the various Village Councils, and should function only in such spheres of administration as have been specifically assigned to it under the provisions of the Local Self-Government Act.

The District Council federating the various Taluks of the District should be formed by election from Taluk Councils, and should have only such functions as, by the very nature of the Taluk and village administrations, could not be appropriately carried out in those smaller spheres.

The Provincial Legislature should be constituted by election from District Councils, and should have only such specific functions as are considered to be of an all-provincial interest.

The Federal Legislature should be constituted by election from Provincial Legislatures, and this is a point already conceded by the Simon Commission.

The same reasons which inspired the Commission to recommend this system of election to the Federal Legislature are applicable to the other smaller bodies like the Provincial Councils, and the District and Taluk Councils, and only such a system would make the principle of federation complete in every respect.

The principle of indirect election might not satisfy orthodox democratic opinion in India ; but this is the only method, however imperfect it might be, for guaranteeing the representation of the rural masses. The existing arrangements, as well as those that are suggested for the future, do not safeguard the masses against exploitation by the rich or by the members of the legal profession whose blandishments or threats capture more than 95 per cent of the rural constituencies, and reduce representative democracy to a colossal sham. Not only is democracy thus denied, but the complex administrative machinery that must be set up with increasing expenditure at every progressive stage of political advance will be a heavy financial burden which inevitably falls on the rural masses without the slightest corresponding benefit or advantage. A Federal Constitution would necessarily involve an administrative machinery, twice as costly as the existing one ; but to impose this burden on the country without conferring on it the legitimate right to express its will through the constitution, or the legitimate means of so expressing it, would be an act of inconceivable tyranny.

After all, there is nothing inherently sacrosanct in a direct system of voting. The vote is merely a method of selection when there is a definite division of opinion involving uncertainty ; and even in the modern House of Commons, many members are returned ' unopposed ' without any actual voting taking place in their election. A man may be representative, practically *consensu omnium*, although no vote resulting from a division of opinion has been taken for

the purpose of selecting him. The representative character of an assembly does not essentially depend upon the particular method of election by vote.

I do not propose indirect election only for rural areas; in fact, I advocate direct election only in the local self-governing units, namely villages so far as they are rural, and towns so far as they are urban; elections to all the other bodies being purely indirect. Under such an arrangement, Taluk, District, Provincial and Federal Legislatures will all be composed of rural and urban representatives elected on an indirect basis, providing, however, in each of them, a sufficiently high percentage for the representation of rural interests. A scheme like this will not only ensure expression of the national will through the constitution, but would sow the seeds of party systems in the future, not along communal lines choking the very breath of democracy, but along the lines of urban and rural India, one representing the progressive element, and the other the conservatives.

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Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1931)

To The Editor, *The Pioneer*.[1]

My letter in *The Pioneer* of 9th April on 'Broad-basing the Reforms' has evoked a certain amount of pertinent criticism from you which resolves itself mainly into three issues:—

(*a*) Direct election as a matter of immediate practical politics cannot be rejected at this stage.

(*b*) Direct election to the Village Council may not eliminate the existing undesirable elements of obstruction to the expression of the will of the people through the constitution.

[1] *The Pioneer*, 15th May 1931.

(*c*) Indirect election to the Provincial Legislatures under the system expounded in my letter would merely tend to transform rural constituencies into pocket boroughs for those very elements which are sought to be eliminated in order to broadbase the reforms. It would also not eliminate the play of the opposing rural and urban interests, which would have to meet somewhere, presumably in the electoral college for election to the Provincial Legislatures, and the rural interests would again be dominated by interests that are purely urban.

One has to accept the contention that direct election as a matter of immediate practical politics cannot be rejected at this stage ; but one would also like to see that this contention is not extended beyond the limits of the Provincial Legislature. So far as the Provincial Legislature is concerned, opinion has been unanimous since the Montagu-Chelmsford Report in favour of direct election. The Joint Select Committee, the Franchise Committee of the 1919 Reforms, and quite recently the Simon Commission have all expressed themselves in favour of the same idea, and any suggestion, however well substantiated it might be, for the replacement of direct election by indirect cannot but be regarded as retrograde.

It would, however, interest us to note the circumstances under which direct election came to be regarded as a better method of election to the Provincial Legislature, and the circumstances under which it came to be sponsored by successive Commissions and Committees. The intention is clear in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report that the system of indirect elections which existed in the Minto-Morley Reforms should be swept away because of the unreality which characterized the councils and the absence of any genuine relationship between the representative and the original voter. The intention was indeed magnanimous ; but the remedy was not suggested after a full diagnosis

of the disease. The unreality and absence of genuine relationship between the representative and the voter were no doubt there; but it was never due to the indirect election as such, but to the most unsatisfactory manner in which the local boards were at that time constituted, and functioning. These local boards which chose members to the Provincial Councils were never representative of the rural areas and functioned merely as advisory councils to the district officers who were their presidents *ex-officio*. The local boards themselves were thus unreal and without any relationship to the rural voters, and these characteristics naturally reflected on the representatives whom these bodies were asked to choose for the Provincial Legislature. The real remedy against the disease which was found to exist in the system would have been retention of the indirect system of election with a simultaneous overhauling of the machinery of Local Self-Government.

The Simon Commission have made no proposal for rectifying this mistake although they have been alert enough to admit the existence of the evil. They therefore also recommend direct election to the Provincial Legislature in order to give a training to the voter in India in political responsibility. Perhaps as a remedy against the evil they are suggesting an extension of the franchise, while it is all along my contention that the franchise itself is an evil, when the method of safely and soundly exercising the privilege is not simultaneously granted. Possibly the Commission had in their mind a system of 'political homœopathy', when in order to remedy an evil arising from a system of franchise, they recommend an extension of it. Would it not have been reasonable to ask how such a *training* as they had in view was availed of by the voter during the ten years the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were in operation? The political education granted by the reforms of 1919 was unsatisfactory,

because by the curious system of franchise and electoral qualifications which it introduced large classes of educated people were thrown out without the power to vote, while the most illiterate were brought to the polls without the slightest realization of the significance of the rights and privileges which the power of the vote carried with it. If the working of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms is to be regarded as a test for further extension of the franchise, it shall be bound to be an inordinate and thoughtless extension only leading to a breakdown of the machinery through sheer weight of numbers. Starting with quite unimpeachable intentions, the Simon Commission erred in the same manner as the authors of the 1919 Reforms, and dismissed the question of Local Self-Government in the course of a few paragraphs, retaining as their worthy predecessors had once done the system of direct election to the Provincial Legislature.

The history of direct election to the Provincial Legislatures has been a history of which no one can be proud, and from which no one can take any lessons for the future until local self-government becomes an accomplished fact in Indian politics. Knowing as I do, to some extent, the practical political wisdom characteristic of English statesmanship, I am not able to persuade myself that direct election has been introduced for elections to Provincial Legislatures as a matter of conviction rather than of political expediency. Presumably it is a concession to political agitation; but at every stage of this concession to a microscopic intelligentsia, the development of a living, and evolving political organism based on the common will and political consciousness of the masses is being retarded—a development for which Britain stands morally committed.

Barring political expediency, direct election as a democratic principle operating for the development of political consciousness in the masses can be introduced

so far as I have watched the extent and nature of the national awakening in India, only for elections to the Village Council. A federal constituency is too big for it; so also are provincial, district and Taluk constituencies. Not only this; in other constituencies than that of the village, the economic power of the industrial employer, or a landed proprietor, or the intellectual dominance of the legal profession which comes to play in direct elections is too subtle, pervasive and legally unregulated to be over-ridden by the political consciousness of the masses. Such a possibility is reduced to a minimum under the scheme which I have expounded, because it makes all the difference when a landlord or a lawyer or an industrial magnate chooses to seek election to a provincial council after satisfying the condition that membership of a provincial council requires membership of a village council so far as rural representation is concerned, and membership of a village council requires in its turn permanent residence in the village. It is not so much an inherent dislike of the existing types of representation as such, as it is a distrust of the system which gives no necessity for the representatives to come into contact with the electorate, and to feel a sense of responsibility towards the electorate. These are the very defects which are secured against by the operation of my scheme. For him who ignores the villager, the scheme denies deservedly the right of seeking election on his behalf; but for him who is prepared to share the lot of the villager, the scheme gives an opportunity to represent him in the highest legislatures of the land.

This is the only manner in which a living touch between rural India and the higher spheres of political life can be established, and without this living touch Indian political life will remain an unreality. Indirect election amply satisfies the requirements of this connexion, and my proposal has the warm support of the

Simon Commission and the Montagu-Chelmsford Report so far as the federal legislature is concerned. But what I want to emphasize again and again is the fact that, while the recommendations of the Simon Commission with regard to indirect election to the federal legislature are thoroughly sound, the circumstances in which they made those recommendations are found to exist in every province, district and taluk in India and the greatest mistake which they made was in taking the provinces as the proper field for the political education of the masses. Political education must necessarily begin in India with the village, and the rural folk of the villages of India, however illiterate they may be in the modern sense of the term, are endowed with such an amount of sturdy common sense as to make the best use of the opportunities given to them for political education. Besides, the political agitation in the country under Mr. Gandhi has created in the rural mind a desire for political life, and a deep yearning for information and knowledge regarding civic rights and responsibilities.

You have rightly pointed out, sir, that a certain point in the electoral scheme which I proposed, presumably in the electoral college for the provincial council, the urban and rural elements must meet, and the urban element must try to dominate the rural. I have myself been keenly alive to this dangerous phenomenon ; but I hope I had made my implication definitely clear that a system would have to be devised by which a certain proportion of the rural element would be secured in the provincial councils. Proportional representation with the single transferable vote may well be tried as one of the safest of the devices ; it has the blessing of the Simon Commission with regard to the federal legislature ; it has been tried as a solution for the problem of minority representation in several of the post-war constitutions in Europe ; and it is one of the safest ways of avoiding

the most retrograde step of introducing separate electorates in the future constitution of India.

I am far from claiming any novelty for the scheme that I have expounded; mainly it is an extension of the recommendations of the Simon Commission in respect of federal representation of all elective bodies below the federal legislature except the village council. Whatever the demerits of the scheme, which may well be rectified after further deliberation, the omission of the problem of rural India from consideration at the Round Table Conference must be regarded as an omission that will have a very disastrous bearing on the whole future political life of the country.

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Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1931)

To an Indian nominee to the Round Table Conference.

You take, I notice, exception to what I wrote in *The Pioneer,* date 25th March on the subject of Indian franchise. But I am convinced that under the present condition of the social and economic life of the masses, direct election cannot safeguard their interests. Am I wrong when I assert that ' extension of franchise has no value where legislatures are dominated by urban interests and where the politician comes into actual contact with the rural masses only at the time of elections to broadcast pledges which are never intended to be fulfilled ' ? This remark induced the Editor to write an article in which he invited me to suggest how ' the rural vote may be made closely to reconcile to actual rural opinion '. Well, I put forward a plan, not by any means original, that the basic political unit should be the village and that the method of indirect election should be adopted.

ıe proposal evoked considerable criticism in the an press. *The Pioneer* (7th December 1931) comted upon what the paper described with sarcasm the architecturally attractive scheme to build political edifice, terrace upon terrace, somewhat the famous Shalimar',[1] and said:

'erhaps it will gratify Mr. Gangulee that his proposal, gely or otherwise, would seem to have appealed to Mr. lhi and Mr. Baldwin, and that Mrs. Besant, though ıll, ɔut ın a word for it in recollection of her own design in Commonwealth of India Bıll. The question is whether : is any real case for Professor Gangulee's idea and ıvhether ll go down with India—with even the rural India which hampions with such admirable zeal.'

ut listen to the conclusion of the Editorial. The er observed that 'there is neither much force in Gangulee's contention nor would it make for the ;faction of India—we repeat, even the rural India hich he has constituted himself the chief advocate. le using those magic words "rural India" it is no forgetting that the much denounced urbanites fundamentally rural people, rural in their affilias, rural in their outlook. The sooner, therefore, bogey of rural India is abandoned, the better it be for all interests.'

ow urban is this attitude! Am I then to under- d there is a fundamental unity of interest between rural and urban electorates? My own reading ndian economic and social history is different.

ut I am writing to you in the hope that you will g this question of indirect election before the erence. The difficulties in its adoption are not rmountable, and I believe the proposal will be ıurably received by the Congress party. . . .

A Moghul garden in Lahore.

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New Delhi
(1931)

To a Bengal politician.

The suggestion for indirect election has roused the anger of our urban politicians. A writer in *The Pioneer* writes as follows:

'Professor Gangulee, with a tenacity worthy of a better cause, is pleading for indirect elections to the Federal Legislature and a quaint constitution in the name of the interests of rural India. . . . I mean no affront when I say that the scheme which he has put forward is just the one so accepted of all reactionaries who have clutched at one proposition after another to impede advance. His plan is nothing new: he wants the elective unit to be the village council and tier upon tier should be built up so that the ultimately successful representatives of the people may have passed through many trying processes. What I fail to understand is the nature of interests these worthies are particularly fitted to safeguard and why the relentless Professor thinks that his method is more capable than direct elections of infusing a representative character into the ultimately successful individuals. . . . These indirect elections can be a fearful evil and so far as the centre is concerned, the plan will reproduce the worst features of provincial squabbles. The overwhelming majority in India will have none of the indirect elections business notwithstanding Mr. Gandhi and Mrs. Besant.'

Well, I had expected this opposition from our political caste. But I have not as yet come across any effective arguments against the adoption of indirect election. Perhaps the Indian Franchise Committee will tell us why it is considered impracticable, and why our leaders—the majority of them—so stubbornly oppose this suggestion. The only constitutional protection offered to the people is their voting power; but just see how hopelessly it is distributed on the principle of castes, creeds and on the policy of protecting 'special interest'. The Indian Statutory Commission thought of landlords, Europeans

in India, depressed classes, industrial labour and Anglo-Indians; but nothing is mentioned about the tenant and the agricultural labour. It is proposed to enfranchise some tenants but I do not see how this would bring about their representation in our legislatures.

I met a member of the Franchise Committee here. He agreed that the stability of the parliamentary system of Government in India would depend on a proper system of franchise; but it was difficult to devise an electoral system based on adult suffrage at the moment. There are about 130 million adults in India and one can imagine how difficult it would be to set up and control the electoral machinery necessary to deal with all these adult votes. 'Why not divide the adult population into groups?' I suggested. He rejected the suggestion with the remark that on account of the prevalence of communal divisions group elections would be impracticable and that the idea of the 'delegated vote' was unacceptable to the Indian public men. So we are, I fear, going to have restricted suffrage, property qualification, separate electorates, special constituencies—all these curious devices of introducing democratic form of government in India. I wish our political gods all success!

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Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1931)

To the Editor of *The Statesman*.[1]

We are now at the threshold of a great political change and a simultaneous economic reorganization, and the statesman at the helm of our affairs must be

[1] *The Statesman*, 6th May 1931.

one who is endowed with that freshness of knowledge and experience which is most suitable to India's peculiar political and economic circumstances.

It is in this respect that Lord Willingdon's appointment as the Viceroy and Governor-General in India must be regarded as most opportune and particularly welcome and appropriate. It may be remembered that His Excellency's term of Viceroyalty practically commenced from the shores of Canada, and the association of ideas with which His Excellency brought to a termination his distinguished period of Governor-Generalship in that Dominion has been allowed to be happily continued in India without any intervening space of time or distracting influences of other political activities. That, to my mind, is the greatest asset to India in the Viceroyalty of His Excellency Lord Willingdon.

Indian politics today are suffering rather from a plethora of constitutional models than from any want of it. There are many who suggest a federation on the German model, while several others there are who would not be satisfied with anything less than the purely American model of the United States. In a confusion of analogies of this kind the lead which His Excellency would be able to give would be the best that can be thought of, because the Canadian constitution provides a much better example for India than any other federal structure.

But, the value of even the most perfect model of a constitution is nothing unless it can be made to grow on strong and sound foundations, and the lead which His Excellency Lord Willingdon can give to us by instructing India in the sure and safe path along which the Canadian constitution has grown on its foundations shall be a lead which will be of incalculable benefit to the country. The greatest resemblance between India and Canada lies in the fact that both are countries mainly agricultural with vast untapped natural

resources. Of the land available for agricultural production, Canada is utilizing today only about 39·3 per cent. But she is making steady progress in her agriculture, inasmuch as from an agricultural revenue of 1,397,085,000 dollars in 1923 she has been able to increase the figure to 1,730,304,000 dollars in 1928, i.e. an increase of nearly 24 per cent in the course of five years. What India may, therefore, legitimately expect from His Excellency Lord Willingdon is a lead in the matter of developing her natural resources to the maximum on lines similar to those he found prevailing in Canada, and a stout advocacy of such a form of constitution as would ensure not merely that there will be no retardation in the development of her resources but on the contrary that their development will be materially accelerated.

To Lord Irwin who came to India with none of the administrative experience which Lord Willingdon is now able to bring to bear on his term of Viceroyalty, India owes a deep debt of gratitude for his overflowing sympathy for the rural masses, and for the manner in which he strove to bring into prominence the problem of rural India. All that he could do within the short space of five years has been to prepare the design for future work, and to embody it in the form of the Imperial Council for Agricultural Research, a body most suited for expansion and adjustment in any federal framework of the future. It will be one of the greatest achievements of His Excellency Lord Willingdon if, to the framework and designs left behind by Lord Irwin, he would add the motive power and driving force with that abundance of experience and knowledge which he must have gathered from Canada. His Excellency must be thoroughly acquainted with the multifarious useful activities of an organization like the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research as it exists in Canada ; and the only manner in which it can be made to function in India to the

extent to which the Royal Commission on Agriculture intended it, is to bring to bear upon it the direct personal experience which His Excellency must have gained during his Governor-Generalship in that Dominion.

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Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1931)

To the Editor, *The Englishman.*[1]

Sir John Marriott, whose authority to speak on political questions no one dares challenge, has an illuminating article on the Indian political problem in the *Fortnightly Review.* It is illuminating in the sense that it takes into account the limitations that present conditions in India impose on anything like a normal Federal Constitution. The immediate task, he asserts, is the full development of the component parts until the attainment of a position of sovereignty, when necessity will be felt for some kind of political alliance with the neighbouring units.

Sir John Simon, Chairman of the Statutory Commission, and one who by his close and sympathetic study of the Indian question is entitled to speak with authority, gave us a bit of his mind the other day when, speaking in London at the Bombay dinner, he observed that it would be an unprecedented feat in the history of the world if the experiment was tried in India of developing a federation and its component parts simultaneously. He advised India to concentrate her attention for the time being on the question of provincial autonomy, leaving the idea of federation to develop itself naturally, as it was bound to, from among the autonomous provinces.

[1] *The Englishman,* 13th July 1931. Then a daily newspaper published in Calcutta.

Dr. Annie Besant, a tried and trusted friend of India, writing in a recent issue of the *Indian Review*, reminds the Constitution makers of the fact that there are over 70 million people in India today who have not known at any time in their life what it is not to be hungry, and puts in a plea for a Constitution that will relieve these millions from their hunger. She ascribes this miserable state of affairs of the masses to a costly administration on the one hand, and to the absence of any substantial measures undertaken by the State for the relief of the masses. Does a Federal Constitution, which in reality is not federal and which will merely create the administrative form of federalism, assure a better state of affairs for the masses than the one from which they are suffering today?

These are opinions on current Indian politics which, from the importance of the persons who uttered them, deserve the closest consideration. As for myself, except for the fact that I see in the neglect of the interests of the rural masses in the deliberations of the Round Table Conference, the greatest national interest of the country being neglected, I can only echo the sentiments of the Sage of Chelsea and say: 'We do not know where we are, and we cannot say whither we are going.' It looks as if the rural masses have no interests at all, or that if they have any, such interests are considered to be amply safeguarded by the inclusion of a few landlords in the Indian delegation. The rural masses are unorganized and inarticulate, and cannot make their voice heard by the powers that be. The landlords, far from representing real rural interests, are their misrepresentatives in many respects. Every minority interest that has been providentially provided with a political mouth has got representation; but the 80 per cent majority of the country has been thrown into the background because it is unorganized and voiceless.

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Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1931)

To a friend in England.

Gandhi during his visit to England as a member of the second Round Table Conference is reported to have remarked on 'the unreality of the debates that were carried on at St. James's Palace', because adequate emphasis was not given to the fundamental problems affecting the great majority of the Indian population.

The village is the nerve-centre of the entire social and economic life in India. No political government will effectively function unless that nerve-centre is strengthened. And yet the proceedings had very little to record about the prospects of rural India under the proposed new Constitution, and it is not surprising that grave doubts in regard to its success arise in the minds of those who are familiar with India's poverty and its consequent effects on the Indian masses. The constitution that will not relieve the millions from the grip of poverty, illiteracy and social bondage, or, that will not substantially increase the expenditure of the Central and Provincial Governments in respect of Agriculture and Industry, Education, Public Health and Transport, or that will not make way for an immediate readjustment of the land tenure systems of the country and rigorously control usury, direct or indirect—that constitution can never help India to advance towards the ideal of self-government.

I am not surprised that the conference has not only failed to reconcile the divergent views on the problems of Indian Federation, but that there has been no settlement, even in regard to the 'essentials'. The true inwardness of Indian problems has not as yet dawned upon us. During the last five years the

Government and their nominees have been busy assembling abundant materials, designed for the purpose of understanding the realities of the condition in which a federal structure is to be erected. The 'Indian Caravan' is now loaded with the reports of the Statutory Commission, the Round Table Conferences and a number of fact-finding Committees; and yet the discussion on the 'essentials' still becomes an arena where, to quote a simile of Lord Winterton—'the tired old circus horses of phrases and sentiments' continue to trot round. How long is this state of affairs to be continued? It is obvious that the scheme of Indian Constitution contemplated will not be acceptable to the Congress, and the National Liberals, though prepared to work a pseudo-democratic constitution, find themselves unorganized as an effective political party in the country. Those who are able to express an unbiased opinion on Indian Federation hold the view that in absence of development of the component parts required for a genuine federal structure, there can be no stable Federal Constitution for India. Why not then begin with provincial autonomy and confederation with 'Indian India'? Does a Federal Constitution which, in reality, is not federal and which will merely create the administrative form of federation, assure a better state of affairs for the masses than the existing one? Is there any inherent virtue in the proposed Federal Constitution for India, which may prove to be far more expensive than India can possibly afford? Would not the proposed Federal Constitution for India increase the cost of administration necessitating the imposition of additional taxation on the Indian masses? The framers of a new Constitution for India should realize that the problems of mass-education, rural health, rural indebtedness, complicated land tenure systems and other matters that directly affect the masses require immediate attention from the Government.

We cannot overlook the fact that two of the most fruitful sources of agrarian revolt exist in India—poverty and illiteracy. Already we see the wrack of threatening clouds on the horizon; and if they burst in storm, we cannot exonerate ourselves from the blame by simply ascribing these disturbances to an alien rule. Do the Indian Princes, landlords and *Mahajans*, realize that they have not done what they should have for the tillers of soil? Yet they know so well the miserable condition of the bulk of our population. Perhaps India waits for a Wat Tyler!

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Ballygunj
(Bengal)
(1931)

To a Congress politician.

Since you take an interest in the work of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, I am glad to send you a copy of its report wherein you will notice that a scheme for an All-India research on rice has been approved of. The Council expects a substantial grant from the Empire Marketing Board. Another example of how India may usefully co-operate with some of the constructive agencies of the British Commonwealth.

I well understand your criticisms of my political convictions and venture to assure you that I do not for a moment minimize the power wielded at present by the Indian National Congress. But I fail to appreciate its programme of non-co-operation. Incapable of creative efforts that would have roused the country from deadly inertia, the Congress appears to play the role of a spiritual movement. What is the meaning of Gandhi's gospel of suffering? I am in full agreement with Tagore when he says 'Politics

in our country is extremely petty. It has a pair of legs, one of which has shrunk and shrivelled and become paralytic and therefore feebly waits for the other one to drag it on. There is no harmony between the two; and our politics, in its hoppings and totterings and falls, is comic and undignified.'

What I feel is that in India, we must have the *background* of 'democracy' firmly established prior to the inauguration of the constitutional reforms proposed by the Round Table Conference. To my mind, that background is in such a decrepit condition that it is well nigh impossible to construct a magnificent superstructure of democratic Federal System which appears to have inspired our constitution-makers.

I must thank you for repeating your all-too-familiar taunt of 'cobblers' love for leather' meaning thereby my persistent emphasis on rural uplift as a means of providing the foundation of a stable constitution for India. The trend of events in China and other countries where the social and economic structure is altogether shaky strengthens my own conviction. So long as radical improvements are not effected in that structure, so long as the Indian masses remain so dangerously poor, I believe it is idle to expect any success in the working of the proposed constitution.

You must have carefully read Sir Walter Layton's[1] note in the Report of the Indian Statutory Commission. I think he has put his finger on a key situation, namely, insufficiency of India's revenues to make even a reasonable provision for expenditure on social services, such as education, health and sanitation. Then, for the purpose of accelerating the process of economic development, the future Government of India will need increased revenue. Already the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, the only child so far of the

[1] An eminent Financial Assessor attached to the Commission.

Royal Agricultural Commission, is threatened with retrenchment. The financial stringency cripples every single constructive programme; it marred the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and it will, I fear, reduce this grandiose scheme of All-India Federation to a sham.

The Bengal politicians are however optimistic; they demand a large share of the jute export duty in the hope of improving the financial position of the Government. This duty, as you know, is collected by the Customs Department which is under the Central Government. The amount earned varies from 4 to 5 crores of Rupees (one crore=£750,000) annually.

I hold the view that the jute export duty for fiscal reasons may in future be abolished or reduced and that it cannot be depended on as a source of any permanent relief either to Bengal's finance or to the Central Government.

How is it that our Bengal public men have not laid stress on the taxation of unearned increments? For the success of provincial 'autonomy' in Bengal the imposition of such a tax is, I believe, necessary. We cannot overlook the fact that a host of intermediaries between government and the tillers of the soil appropriates about 5 crores (£3,750,000) per annum as their share of rents! This source of revenue will have to be exploited if Bengal wants a real 'self-government'.

Then, agricultural reform must begin with the simplification of the land tenure systems of the province; and the time is passed for fitful efforts. The actual tiller of the soil must be the proprietor of the land. Once this is done, you will prepare the way for many other conditions precedent to rural and agricultural development. Will the future government of Bengal have the courage to end the Permanent Settlement?

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Ballygunj (Calcutta)
(1931)

To a friend in America.

I am not in active touch with the Congress but I follow its activities with a keen interest. Gandhi has undoubtedly succeeded in rousing the masses from the inertia of centuries, but he has definitely failed to indicate any lines of effective action. His means and methods are not only inadequate for the solution of problems that confront modern India but there is certainly a wide divergence of ideas between this ' medieval reactionary ', as Tagore calls him, and what modern India is striving to achieve. The Indian masses responded to him chiefly because of two distinctive features which distinguished him from other Indian leaders. He spoke to them in such terms as are easily understood by them ; and they saw in him a personification of the ideals he preached. He knew that the simple life of self-denial would have a strong appeal to the masses, and his programmes for their salvation were equally simple. I must admit that he has inspired a number of followers with his ideals ; and yet his movement seems to have lost its hold on the middle-class gentry who belong to the Congress. I found a large number of Congress members who accepted Gandhi's programmes not from any deep conviction of their efficacy but in the hope of using Gandhi's influence for gaining freedom from British rule. In other words, they are preparing themselves for ' Swaraj ' and Gandhi is experimenting with truth !

The result of this difference between Gandhi and the Congress had led to confusion and may eventually create a serious split in the ranks of his followers. So far we have had the spectacular developments of

the non-co-operation movement but I do not believe there is sufficient cohesion among the leaders for developing an effective challenge to the Government. ' The experiment with truth ' may excite your admiration, but for India the most needed impetus is the passion for social justice. I am convinced that Tagore's diagnosis of India's problem is correct. He repeatedly told his countrymen that the ' real problem in India is not political; it is social '. He warned us against the over-emphasis of nationalism which would create ' the same inertia which leads us to our idolatry of dead forms in social institutions. He realized that India could never expect to build a political miracle of freedom upon the quicksand of social slavery.

So, you see, when I insist upon the amelioration of the condition of life of our people, I am more inspired by the passion for social justice than by nationalism. The goal to be placed before youth in India is, I believe, social service, an organized crusade against all forms of social injustice which exist in social and economic spheres. Our political goal will emerge from the freedom we shall acquire in the process of modernizing our social structure. Yes, I am a reformist. I believe non-co-operation can never be successful when its methods are aimed at a highly organized Government.

I feel you will be disappointed at my views on Gandhi's movement. But I put no faith in this Round Table Conference either. Our task is to release the creative energies of the vast conglomeration of peoples in this vast sub-continent. ' Better farming, better business and better living ' should be our motto.

You ask me about the growth of communism in India. I do not know anything about the party and its activities. But I do not believe it will take root in the Indian soil; for since the time of Buddha there has

developed a distaste among the Indian masses for all forms of violence, although we have had indications of revolt when they suffer under intolerable injustice.

My own conviction is that the only way to safeguard India against communism is to develop the corporative State. Perhaps we will come to that form of government after giving democracy a trial.

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London
(1933)

To a British Statesman.

Recently Tagore made a pronouncement to which I venture to draw your attention. He said: 'One is apt to forget them (rural folks), just as one does not think of the earth on which one walks. But these men compose the great mass of life, which sustains all civilizations and bears their burdens. . . . Thousands of acres of land are tilled so that a university can be maintained upon one acre.'

My opposition to this grand federal structure, consisting of a federal senate, a federal legislature, a federal court and many other forms of administrative mechanism, is that the burden of the entire edifice will fall upon the shoulders of the Indian masses. Take the case of franchise. The Indian Franchise Committee estimate the cost of each election to the central government and the various provinces at some half a million sterling on the basis of a 75 per cent poll; and to the candidates and political organizations at some £750,000. Who, do you suppose, would ultimately pay this amount?

Regarding the financial position of the proposed Federal and Provincial Governments, I would beg you to consider carefully the report of the Percy

Committee. This committee have drawn a rosy picture of the 'federal forecast' but it is wholly devoid of any substance. The truth is that the White Paper proposals, if carried out, would impose an intolerable burden on the people, and that each province carries a deficit budget and the Central Government cannot hope to have any surplus. The Percy Committee have not taken into consideration the cost of the proposal to create two new provinces—Sind and Orissa. This proposal alone would involve a Federal subvention of Rs. 2½ crores (£1·88 millions). The Secretary of State for India tells us that the initial deficits of the provinces will be met by the Federal Government. But how? By increasing the salt tax? While the Indian masses whose trustee is, so we are told, the Imperial parliament, get nothing from this Federation, the Indian States expect exemptions from the payment of tributes and some of them will receive cash compensation for territory surrendered. The landlords who came to the Round Table Conferences did not raise the question of taxing their agricultural incomes as suggested by the Simon Commission.

The situation is hopeless. And remember 'dangerous poverty' exists in India. No other country felt the effects of the present depression so much as India. The Indian revolutionaries aim at the creation of 'a rebellious mass-mind'; you resist their attempts with the machinery of law and order. But any measure that may impose fresh burdens upon the masses would fulfil the very object of the revolutionaries. The Indian peasant is a peace-loving, patient and humble individual; he is conservative in his outlook on life, but he, as recently observed by Sir John Thompson, 'may, by appropriate means, be stirred to revolutionary fury'. The conditions of life of the Indian masses are depressing and there lurk the germs of revolt.

91

London
(1933)

To a friend in Bengal.

At long last one Provincial Government have instituted a Commissionership of Rural Reconstruction. I have not as yet in my possession the details of the scheme the Government of the Punjab have in view. But it is an experiment that is worth doing and its success will depend on the development of effective co-ordination with voluntary associations that exist in some parts of the province. Mr. Brayne has the knowledge and the will to have a plan of rural reconstruction carried out. But it is not known what powers will be invested in this office. I am afraid some of the fundamental questions will remain outside the authority of the Rural Commissioner.

The Punjab scheme brings back to my memory an interview I had in 1929 with the Governor of Bengal, Sir Stanley Jackson. Our conversation began with the needs of Bengal peasantry and how they could be met. His Excellency was recounting all the things the Department of Agriculture had been doing when I put forward my plea for a comprehensive plan for attacking rural problems. I pointed out that the various agencies that came in contact with our rural folks did their official duties without any effort to bring into play their co-ordinated force in order to grapple with rural problems. 'Could I suggest how this desired co-ordination might be brought about?' asked His Excellency.

Then I developed the idea of a Rural Development Board and promised to submit to His Excellency a memorandum[1] on the subject. Its contents were

[1] Published in my *Notes on Indian Constitutional Reform*, Art Press, Calcutta, 1930.

made known to the public and I sent a copy to each District Board. Nothing came out of all this attempt to induce the Government of Bengal to frame a comprehensive policy based on effective liaison with all units concerned in the welfare of the countryside. My next move was to interest some of our ministers but they had been suffering from a defeatist attitude and comforted me by saying that no funds were available for giving effect to my proposals. That's that.

Now, tell me how are you going to improve this position by enlarging the Council, by introducing a Second Chamber, or by other political expedients you wish to secure from this Government. Democracy is an expensive business and I do not see how you are going to foot the bill for all the things you want and the masses need. The entire system on which our rural life is based is ill suited for any form of democracy and if you force its construction on this foundation, there will be chaos.

92

London
(1933)

To a social worker in India.

I can well imagine how disturbed you must feel in consequence of this recrudescence of communalism. It is unbelievable that the Hindu Mahasabha should have decided to organize a corps of volunteers to stop 'Moslems kidnapping Hindu women'! Do these Hindu leaders think that any self-respecting Moslem would tolerate the insult and vulgarity of this attitude implied in the Mahasabha's manifesto? Are we not making ourselves ridiculous in the estimation of the civilized world? The Nationalists shout from the house-top that 'the Hindu-Moslem differences are the great sheet-anchor of British policy in India. They are the foundation of British rule'. Well, assuming

that it is so, what effective measures have our public men taken to wipe out this shameful feature from Indian social and political life? We must remember that Gandhi's 'satanic government' can only flourish in this satanic society which fosters the Hindu-Moslem antagonism. Indeed communal feelings have corrupted the moral atmosphere of the country to such an extent that our future is dark. My fear is that Indian rural folk can no longer be kept immune from the epidemic of communalism; and once this virus permeates rural life, our task for rural reconstruction will be extremely difficult. Already a class of professional politicians has risen amongst us who seek to rouse the interest of constituencies by introducing communal issues in election campaigns. By inflaming communal feelings they make themselves champions of the community to which they belong. But the nemesis of their folly will soon overcome them, I hope. Meanwhile we must do all we can to stress all the features of common interests that bind the two communities in the pursuit of their vocation. You must bring them together as often as you can in your village; speak to the Hindus about the life of Mohammed and to the Moslems about the Hindu epics; encourage the children of the two communities to play together; and above all keep yourself and your friends aloof from political intrigues.

93

London
(1933)

To a friend in England.

. . . I never stood for any election in India and consequently have not had the experience of running an election. But I had carefully followed two or three electioneering campaigns in rural areas. Although the rural voter is a shrewd person and can form an

independent judgement of the candidates, I am afraid he is not free to use his own discretion in casting votes. The candidates depend more upon the support of a few influential persons, such as landlords or their agents, or money-lenders, or lawyers' touts, than their own qualifications. The voters know nothing or very little of the party whose candidates press them for votes; patronage of rural plutocrats and, in some instances, bribery in disguised forms are the main sources of strength for the candidates. It is a pathetic sight to see a group of rural voters ushered into the polling station by a crew of agents appointed by the candidates. Here is an extract from a memorandum prepared by the Government of the United Provinces under the chairmanship of the late Sir Alexander Muddiman which I believe contains a true picture of an Indian election. The memorandum states:

'When the polling-day comes, voters are brought to the poll in large batches, generally by villages, sometimes by castes. Transport now plays an important part in elections and all manner of conveyances are brought into use: motor lorries, motor cars, *tongas*, *ekkas*, bullock carts and even camel carts. The voters are generally collected and brought to the poll by friends of the candidates, by servants of landholders, or by different organizations such as the *Hindu Sabha* and the *Arya Samaj*. . . . For the most part it is clear that it is the influence of the landholding classes that is chiefly relied on to bring voters to the polling station.'

Of course, these features are not peculiar to India. Only on account of widespread illiteracy and economic dependence of the enfranchised minority upon landlords or money-lenders, the system results in gross abuses. I do however agree with the Indian Statutory Commission that the vote is 'an instrument of political education and as a source of potential political influence'. In order to attain the object, the rural voter must be freed from any form of economic servitude and he must be protected against the methods

resorted to by political adventurers during the electioneering campaigns.

In the press you are often told of the growing political awakening of the Indian masses. I consider such a statement to be incorrect. True, the masses are beginning to be restive; they realize that the conditions of life under which they live are deplorable; and they know the circumstances of their poverty. But they do not know that franchise is the remedy of the ills they suffer from. We have had rural constituencies since 1921. Have the enfranchised rural folks been in any way benefited by the privilege of using the ballot-box?

The other day I was reading a book entitled *The India We Saw*, by the Hon. Edward Cadogan, M.P. (who was a member of the Indian Statutory Commission). It is an interesting record of impressions the author has had during his tours in India. He says: 'The conclusion I have reached after visiting many villages in many parts of India on this and other occasions, is that their inhabitants are still in a primitive state of civilization utterly remote from the political movement which some authorities today tell us is agitating the rural populations from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. Enthusiasts may delude themselves into believing that great changes are imminent, and that there is a perceptible infiltration of political consciousness among the masses, but when we toured up-country on the business of the Royal Commission, such a process had certainly not begun to be apparent to the naked eye.'

You see why I am not an enthusiast for such constitutional changes as are being devised for us in the Whitehall. I fear the position of the masses is likely to remain unaffected by these changes except that they may have to bear an extra burden of tax, direct or indirect, for the privilege of allowing their masters to experiment with democratic parliamentary form of

government. These experiments will not check to any appreciable extent the irresponsible forces of political agitation; will not place all questions of supreme national importance in the forefront of an organized attack on such deficiencies as exist in the Indian countryside.

GLOSSARY OF INDIAN WORDS

ABIANA	water rate.
ABWAB	illegal charges exacted by landlord from tenant.
ADATYAS	a commission agent or broker
AMRITA BAZAR PATRICA	an Indian Nationalist daily published in Calcutta.
ANNA	one-sixteenth of a rupee; equivalent to 1½d.
ARAIN	a tribe of market gardeners.
ARYA SAMAJ	a movement for revival of Hinduism.
ASHRAM	a seminary.
BAJRI or BAJRA	a small millet (*Pennisetum typhoideum*).
BANGA BANDHU	Friend of Bengal; title of a journal.
BANIA	an Indian trader.
BARANI	unirrigated land depending on rain for its water supply.
BATAI	payment of rent in kind by dividing produce between landlord and tenant.
BAZAAR	a market.
BHADROLOG	educated class.
BHILS	an aboriginal tribe of India.
BIGHA	Indian land measurement; equivalent to 0·333 acre.
BOJHA	lit. burden; bundle.
BRAHMINS	priestly caste of the Hindu community.
BRAHMO SAMAJ	a movement for reformation of Hinduism.
BUND	a dam.
BUSTI	slum where labourers live; a collection of huts.
CHAMARS	one of the untouchable communities; mostly leather-workers.
CHAUPAIS	singing party.
CHAVDIS	places where village officers hold their meetings.

CHITALLS	Indian weighment equivalent to about a pound.
COOLIE or COOLY	porter ; labourer.
CRORE	one crore is equivalent to £750,000.
DANGA	a high arable land.
DARGAS	Moslem shrine.
DAROGA	police official.
DHODIA	a low caste Hindu in Bombay.
DOBA	a small village tank.
DUBLA	a low caste Hindu in Bombay.
EKKAS	a kind of conveyance.
GHEE	clarified butter.
GOMATA	mother cow.
GUJAR	a class of cultivators.
GUNTHA	Indian land measurement: equivalent to $1\frac{1}{40}$ acre.
GUR	unrefined sugar.
GURAV	priest.
GURU	preceptor.
GURUMAHASYA	revered teacher.
HALI	a serf.
HANUMAN	monkey.
INAM	a gift.
JAINISM	a Hindu sect arising from the leadership of Jina.
JAT	a people of N.W. India.
JATRA	a quasi-dramatic party.
KALA-AZAR	a malignant fever caused by a parasitic infection.
KALI	a Hindu Goddess.
KALIPARAJ	a classification of low class Hindus in Guzrat.
KAMINS	menials.
KANDIES	a measure of weight.
KAPAS	cotton.
KARMA	action, destiny.
KARMI SANGHA	workers' organization.

KATA	pebrine—a form of disease affecting silk-worm.
KATHA	a grain measure of about 10 lb.
KHADDAR	home-spun and hand-woven cloth.
KHAL	canal.
KHANDI	a measure of weight and capacity which varies according to the commodity, and in many cases, for the same commodity in different localities.
KHARCHA	expenditure
KHAS MAHAL	an estate owned and managed direct by government.
KHILAFAT	a Moslem agitation for the restoration of Khalif.
KIRARS	a class of money-lenders.
KISHAN SABHA	Peasants' organization.
KRISHNA	a character in Hindu mythology.
LAC	a resinous incrustation formed on the bark of twigs of certain trees by the action of the lac-insect (*Coccus lacca*).
LAKH	one hundred thousand.
LOHAR	a blacksmith
MAHABHARATA	a Hindu epic
MAHAJAN	a merchant and creditor.
MAHAJANI	appertaining to credit in trade.
MARATHAS	a sect of Hindus belonging to the Bombay Presidency.
MAHARS	a low caste servant class.
MAHATMA	great soul.
MALGUZAR	intermediary between the cultivator and the Government.
MALIS	a class of gardeners.
MANDAL	a village official.
MANDI	a market.
MARWARI	a native of the Rajput State Marwar ; hold a premier place in money-lending business throughout India.
MAUND	Indian measurement of weight equivalent to 82·28 lb.
MELA	a country fair.
MUNIM	an organizer.
NAIKA	a low class Hindu in Bombay.

NAJAR GAHAN	a form of mortgage which allows the debtor possession of his land.
NAVIS	barbers.
NULLAH	a water course.
PAIKAR	a wholesale dealer.
PANCHAYAT	literally, a committee of five. Now used to describe a village association for settling disputes or for objects of an administrative nature.
PARCHA	a chit.
PARGANA	a judicial division of a district.
PARGANAIT	indigenous Court of Arbitration.
PAT	irrigation channel.
PATEL	headman of a village.
PATHANS	a tribe living in the North-Western Frontier.
PATHSALA	a village primary school.
PINJRAPOLE	a refuge home for disabled and old domestic animals.
PIR	Mohammedan Saint.
POORAH	a land measurement; equivalent to about 1·33 acres.
PRADHAN	chief of a village.
PUJA	worship; temple ceremony.
RADHA	a character in Hindu mythology.
RAJPUTS	natives of Rajputana.
RAMAYANA	a Hindu epic.
RAMOSHIES	watchmen.
RUI	cotton.
RYOT	a cultivator.
RYOTWARI	the system of land tenure under which the revenue is paid by the cultivator direct to the government.
SANTALS	an aboriginal tribe.
SANTINIKETAN	abode of Peace; an institution established by Maharsi Devendranath Tagore, the great religious reformer, the father of Rabindranath Tagore.
SARDAR	chief or headman.
SEER	a weight equivalent to 2·05 lb.
SHAMIANA	a marquee.

SHIVAM	The Good—one aspect of Hindu Trinity.
SIRCAR	the supreme authority; government.
SOWAI	25 per cent interest.
SOWCAR	a money-lender.
SUBEDAR	Indian officer in the Army.
SWARAJ	Home Rule.
TAB GAHAN	a form of mortgage by which the land passes straight away into the hands of the creditor, who must return it on full payment of the debt.
TACCAVI	an advance made by government to cultivators for agricultural improvements.
TAHSIL	a local revenue division of a district.
TAHSILDAR	a revenue officer in charge of a tahsil.
TALATI	a village official.
THANA	a police station.
TONGAS	a kind of vehicle.
UJALIPARAJ	a classification of a group of high caste Hindus in Gujarat.
UPLA	dung cake for fuel.
VARNASHRAM DHARMA	social distinctions based on caste.
ZAIL	a group of villages in a tahsil.
ZAILDAR	a rural official.
ZEMINDAR	a landlord. In the Punjab a peasant proprietor is called Zemindar.

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