

**RESISTANCE, BANDITRY AND RURAL CRIME: ASPECTS OF  
THE FEUDAL PARADIGM IN NORTH INDIA UNDER  
COLONIAL RULE, C. 1800-1840**

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*Introduction*

This paper explores political and ideological aspects of the feudal paradigm in an Indian context. The historical setting is north India during the first four decades of the nineteenth century. These were the first four decades of direct colonial rule in this western part of Bengal Presidency: large scale warfare against the East India Company's forces gave way to rural crime and conflict at the local level; the government of the Company sought to assert its control, and the Company's commercial and revenue policies increasingly affected rural society.

In particular, I am interested in the political activities and ideas of people belonging to a broad stratum of rural society: landlords, peasants, artisans and the itinerant poor. Some rebelled periodically against the Mughal state, and continued from time to time to resist its successors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Some also took to *dakaiti* (banditry and organised robbery) and *thagi* (robbery by trickery and/or murder).

Those known as *thags*, and tried for *thagi*, however, often spoke of their activities in terms of military "service" - *cakari jamadars*, a title of military rank, and many seemed to enjoy leaving hard work on the land for what could be more lucrative or dignified period on the road. Kinship often did provide a basis for cooperation between individual *thags* or *dakaitis*, and colonial officials compiled elaborate genealogical tables to prove it.<sup>3</sup> However, it seems that political links were more important here than kinship or ritual as principles of organisation.

My argument is that within their groups on the move, *thags*

and *dakaitis* showed deference to their *jamadar* or leader; they used martial symbols of status and power; and they conducted their operations within a fragmented polity over which the Company and its regional clients were trying to assert control: these features point directly to aspects of the feudal paradigm.<sup>4</sup>

It is possible to outline three broad types of political activity in rural north India in the early nineteenth century. These partly correspond to the size of the political arena, the scale of the social units engaged in conflict or warfare, and the objectives of those involved.

I would identify the first type as rural conflict at the local level. Disputes over land or its revenue often led to "affrays" between groups of landlords and followers, and punitive or extractive raids could also be part of this conflict. Villagers and the itinerant poor joined in as the landlords' supporters and retainers, or as mercenaries and bandits. An official decision which adversely affected a landlord, might prepare the way for conflict.

When Company officials moved from the background, and became directly involved in a local dispute, it was possible for conflict to escalate. It then resembled a second type of conflict, which I see as local or larger scale resistance to the Company or to its regional client states. This type was often a response to political pressure from these higher authorities. I argue that both these types of rural conflict, with which this paper is largely concerned, were often closely related, and took a course which accentuated the power of landlords, preserved local autonomy where possible, and maintained ideas of deference, loyalty and pride within the armed group.

The third type covers the occasions when peasants attacked or robbed landlords, planters or money-lenders, and perhaps, as "social bandits",<sup>5</sup> broke the ties of deference and registered their protest. On a larger scale, there were also many rebellions and uprisings.

Parts I to IV of the paper deal with the question of the relevance of the feudal paradigm to India; the political aspects of resistance and rural crime under early colonial rule; ideas of deference and symbols of power held by members of roving armed groups such as *thags* and *dakaitis*; and finally, the way in which ideas about feudal power could explicitly or implicitly be bound up with colonial policy towards the rural elites.

I have invoked the feudal paradigm for an account of resistance, banditry and rural crime in early colonial India, not as a model to be superimposed from without, but as a construct which at certain times corresponds quite closely to indigenous ideas and political forms.<sup>6</sup>

While the paper deals with landlords, peasants and bandits in India, it also addresses some important theoretical problems. Does feudalism refer to forms and concepts which are enmeshed

solely within the framework of European history? Concerning transitions from feudalism to capitalism, is self-generating capitalism the only proof of a preceding feudal stage? And what is the place of banditry and rural crime in the context of growing central power or state-formation?

1. *The question of the relevance of the feudal paradigm for India*

The period spanning such events as the death of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, the grant of *diwani* in 1765, which allowed the East India Company to collect the land revenue in eastern India, and the Mutiny and Revolt against British rule in 1857, is crucial in Indian history. This paper does not discuss the history of this period in terms of a grand confrontation between a "feudal system" and the European agents of "world capitalism". I do argue, however, that there are aspects of the resistance to commercial penetration and colonial control which are meaningful in terms of a feudal paradigm.

I refer to aspects of the feudal paradigm, rather than to feudalism, because I see the latter as a construct made up of certain attributes. A society could be called feudal if:

- (1) a weak central authority gives land to powerful local magnates in return for political and military allegiance, or else regional powers assert their autonomy at the expense of central or state power;
- (2) production is mainly agrarian, and wealth and power are derived primarily from land;
- (3) deference and submission are more important than ties of kinship as a basis for political cooperation; and
- (4) ties of patronage and dependence obscure or retard nascent class divisions between landed and landless.

I would stress the dynamic rather than the merely structural features of this paradigm, especially the power struggle between centre or state and region or smaller state in the making.<sup>7</sup> Here I avoid specific reference both to fiefs, manors, vassals and serfs, and to the rise, decline or "persistence" of feudal institutions.<sup>8</sup> I have here referred to feudalism neither as a phase of history between "primitive" or classical and modern capitalist epochs, nor specifically as a mode of production. These are important issues which I discuss below.

With regard to the distinction between kinship and feudalism in point (3) above, I have drawn on Bloch's classic account.<sup>9</sup>

For the idea in point (4) of nascent class divisions being obscured in a feudal society, I have drawn partly on Marx's writings. Although Marx depicted the history of all previous societies in terms of class struggles, including opposition between lord and serf,<sup>10</sup> it was only under the capitalist mode of production that capitalists and capital would exploit the working class and labour, not just in class terms, but "in a direct economic sense".<sup>11</sup> Labour was alienated from the worker, and appropriated by the capitalist.<sup>12</sup>

Marx also contrasts the political relationship between the feudal landlord and his workers or serfs, partly his property and "partly linked to him through a relationship based on respect, submissiveness and duty", with the situation when land became a commodity as private property. It was inevitable:

"... that the rule of the property owner should appear as the naked rule of private property, of capital, divested of all political tincture; that the relationship between property owner and worker should be reduced to the economic relationship of exploiter and exploited..."<sup>13</sup>

The producer or worker "could dispose of his own person only after he has ceased to be bound to the soil, and ceased to be the slave or serf of another person".<sup>14</sup>

On the question of the specificity of feudalism and feudal terminology, Thorner for one thinks that they have western European connotations: the "full complex", with feudal lord, vassal, fief, feudal contact, manor and serf, occurred only in areas of "extreme Western Europe and Japan".<sup>15</sup> Technically this is true, but there are analogies beyond Europe, especially for the fief and the "feudal lord". In India there was no sense in which serfdom could be legally enforced and then legally abolished, as in France in 1793, central Europe in 1848 and Russia in 1861.<sup>16</sup> However, to a varying extent there have been forms of "agrestic servitude" in India since classical times. Share-cropping, bondage through debt and bound labour persisted in most of India into the colonial period and beyond.<sup>17</sup>

Soboul has outlined the persistence of feudalism beyond 1789-1793 in terms of the legal rights retained by French landlords, and has dealt with antifederal aspects of peasant protest.<sup>18</sup> While there were not these same legal rights in pre-colonial India, those who have argued for the persistence of feudal features in India have focused on the enduring coercive power of rural landlords, and on the symbolic manifestation of their power and status. Raychaudhuri, himself of an east Bengal *zamindar* (landlord) family, has dealt with ways in which some *zamindars* could move in a western sphere, while on their estates retaining feudal "pretensions" and power. He refers to the survivals of feudal ties in the *praja - maharaj* (subject - great king) relationship; the maintenance of "feudal" retainers made up of *lathiwalas* (clubmen), river dacoits (bandits) and others; and the "occasional atavistic throwbacks to the days of the robber barons".<sup>19</sup>

There is a connection here with the descriptions by Kosambi, Sharma and Thapar of an Indian form of feudalism. In this view, the main features are political fragmentation, and the rise of landed intermediaries who had military obligations. For Sharma, this rise led to the subservience of the peasants. He also writes of serfdom, and peasants as semi-serfs on donees' land. Thapar deals with the important question of the grant to the "feudatory" not of land but of land revenue, by arguing that in practice a

"feudatory" exercised hereditary power over the land, especially when the king's control was weak. Sharma and Thapar identify a self-sufficient and village-based economy, with an emphasis on land revenue and weak internal trade. In Kosambi's view, villages needed metals and salt from outside, and hence were not completely self-sufficient, and he identifies "the slow increase of trade and commodity production" as the underlying difference between "feudalism from above" and the following stage of "feudalism from below".<sup>20</sup> At any rate, the congruence which these historians identify between economic and political structures in Ancient India is also a key feature of the Marxist view of western feudalism.<sup>21</sup>

This brings me to the question of feudalism as a mode of production, implied by feature (2) of the paradigm above. While it is possible to sustain a logical distinction between fragmented feudal socio-economic units and consolidated world capital,<sup>22</sup> I would argue that the feudal construct has more to offer for political analysis, and that the economic dimension of the "feudal mode of production" can be expressed more clearly by acknowledging the importance of agrarian production by peasants, artisans and labourers. Thorner, for example, argues that medieval European feudalism was a specific form of the peasant economy, and he subsumes Marx's feudal and Asiatic modes of production within a broader category of peasant economies.<sup>23</sup> This approach has the benefit of avoiding purely western categories for world history,<sup>24</sup> but in my view, it does not adequately present changes within "peasant economies" over time. Does not a feudal construct at least introduce a clear historical dimension into social, political and economic analysis?

It is precisely from this historical perspective, however, that Anderson also argues that feudalism existed only in Europe and Japan. He rejects any view which sees feudalism as a universally applicable core within variable political shells, and which explains that the industrial revolution first occurred in Europe because of the distinctive "political and legal superstructures" there. Rather, he argues that it is the genealogy of feudalism and its past as the precursor of capitalism which makes it uniquely European.<sup>25</sup>

To rephrase Anderson's argument, does the fact that India did not undergo some self-generating capitalist "take-off", provide another reason for denying India a feudal past? This in turn raises other questions: to what extent did colonial rule block or divert the forces of economic change in India? What was the nature of the transition from pre-colonial to colonial society? In Pavlov's view of India before the emergence of capitalism there in the second half of the nineteenth century, British rule and British merchant capital was a type of extractive, parasitical growth, and "traditional relations" remained largely undisturbed. Pavlov argues that "... India had in a sense 'skipped' the stage of late feudalism ..."<sup>26</sup>

Bayly in his important if somewhat impressionistic book, presents a very different model of an intrinsic block to capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He argues that the commercialisation of kingly and local power after the Mughals, instead of freeing the labour market and introducing capitalism, merely buttressed that power in a more commercial and bureaucratic form.<sup>27</sup> Bayly draws attention to the important issue of commercial production and urban growth, and presents well the dynamism of the pre-colonial economy of north-west India. However, I would argue that there are more complex reasons for India's failure to move towards capitalism, than the commercial and urban buttressing of local power. The process which strengthened regional powers at the expense of Mughal control also made colonial penetration easier. The eighteenth century saw the appropriation and consumption of non-commercial produce, especially in the course of military conflict. It is also important to note the effects of India being drawn into the world market, and of the extractive activities of British merchants and the East India Company.<sup>28</sup> I would thus place more emphasis on the political events and economic changes of the latter part of the eighteenth century. To return to Anderson's proposition, my view is that the failure to move through an internally generated transition to capitalism, does not preclude the possibility that India had political and economic features analogous to western feudalism. Indeed as Bayly has shown, commercial dynamism, urban growth and local power were perfectly compatible in post-Mughal India.

Finally, there is the important question of whether the concept of feudalism distorts the ideas and political forms conveyed through indigenous terms, whether Sanskrit, Persian, Bengali, Tamil or other. Stein, working through indigenous categories, arrived at non-feudal models such as the "segmentary" and "peasant" states, the "war-state" and the "nayaka system" of warrior magnates.<sup>29</sup> The terms alone are not enough, however since words like *raja* (king) or *samanta* (meaning neighbour, vassal, leader, or even "feudatory prince")<sup>30</sup> take on their full meaning only within a specific social and historical context. To refer to "the warrior-ruler model of the Ksatriya",<sup>31</sup> or to *jajmani* as the basis for state-formation,<sup>32</sup> or to use a phrase in Bengali like *madhyajugiya samanta-pratha* (meaning "medieval feudal system")<sup>33</sup> is to adapt and extend terms or concepts within a western sociological model.

Original texts are invaluable for providing an insight into the ideology of deference and power. A passage from the *Hitopadesa*, a text of the twelfth century or earlier, reads:

"Those brave men, devoted to their master [*bhatrbhakta*] and grateful, who sacrifice their lives for their master [*svamin*], go to heaven.

Wherever a brave man is killed, surrounded by his enemies, he obtains the eternal worlds, if he does not show weakness (cowardice in battle)".<sup>34</sup>

This relationship between the *bhartr* (protector) and his *bhakta* (devoted) follower,<sup>35</sup> conveyed through Sanskrit terminology, can be seen to point directly to a key feature of the feudal paradigm.

## II. *Resistance and rural crime: political conflict under early colonial rule*

The British gained territorial control over Bengal and Bihar, with the grant of *Diwani* in 1765. Between 1801 and 1803, that control extended into the north-west. Parts of central India were added in 1818, the Panjab in 1849, and the process culminated in the annexation of the rest of Awadh in 1856. Control within the frontier was fiscal, through the assessment and collection of revenue; judicial, through law, courts, magistrates and police; and military. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, nominally independent states beyond the colonial frontier were increasingly pushed into a dependent position. At the local level there was often violent resistance to colonial or colonial-backed control. This could take the form of refusal to pay revenue; harbouring "criminals"; or military conflict with the Company's battalions or with soldiers of the regional states.

In response to this pressure by central or regional authorities, economic and political ties between landlords, villagers, mercenaries and bandits might be strengthened to the extent of forming an autonomous mini-state. This process is very much part of the feudal paradigm.

A striking feature of the political landscape in north-western India in this period, was the large number of fortified houses and mud forts. In Etawah district, for example, the magistrate in 1808 listed a total of 456 forts.<sup>36</sup> This is indicative of a polity which was fragmented at local and regional levels.

Landlords ruled their domains from these mud forts, and were assisted by their retainers, peasants or mercenaries. Landlords might use stick-wielding *lathiwalas* to forcibly collect revenue from peasants within their domains. When they launched a punitive or predatory raid outside their domains, their victims would probably call them *dakaitis* (gang robbers or bandits). Or if they were unknown, slipped away or used trickery or disguise, they might be called *thags* (those who cheat, rob and kill). *Thagi* and *dakaiti* were thus bound up with what Max Harcourt usefully calls the "feudal idiom of politics".<sup>37</sup>

Many of those who were captured and tried as *thags* and *dakaitis* made depositions to the authorities. These documents are only available in translation, and since they often served an official purpose as judicial evidence, historians should use them with some caution.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, these depositions convey popular ideas concerning power and status, and provide an invaluable insight into personal histories of illiterate villagers, set within a broader agrarian and political context.

While it is difficult to generalise about the social origins of those convicted of *thagi*, it seems that few *thag* leaders or "jemadars" were *zamindars*, or revenue-collecting landlords. However there were a number drawn from a broad stratum of moderate 'peasant-landholders'.

Futteh Khan is interesting as a *thag* leader. He states that after an expedition in which four were murdered:

"...I remained in my own house for about a year and a half at Guntoulee, working upon my fields as a cultivator, for I rented one hundred begas [*bigha*, approx. 5/8 acre] of land, and employed labourers..."<sup>39</sup>

The timing of his departure from that expedition is also significant: "The season of cutting my crops had arrived, so I left the gang..." together with some of the thugs, and he says he stayed at home for six or twelve months then went on another expedition. He also says "the villagers knew that I was a man who went from home occasionally, but they knew not that I was a murderer!"<sup>40</sup> Futteh Khan was thus a peasant landholder who also went on *thag* expeditions. He was also concerned with the ritual component of *thagi*.<sup>41</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the link between landed wealth, and status within and sponsorship of the Hindu *pujas* (devotions) and other rites performed, apparently by both Hindus and Muslims, before and during *thag* expeditions. Often *dakaitis* also performed a *puja* before a raid, hoping for success.<sup>42</sup>

There were other *thag* landholders. Ramzan, who for a while collected revenue as a *zilladar* on a salary of four rupees per month, held land jointly under what sounds like *bhaiachara* tenure:

"I was and am now the fourth shareholder of the village of Aiter, which pays one hundred Rupees a year to Government as revenue. The other shareholders are relations of mind, but not Thugs, they manage the village affairs."<sup>43</sup>

He also lived elsewhere, and referred to "our village of Gudapore in Oude", from where he set out with Madara on *thagi*. He left there and took his family to Rudowlee where he lived for three years, still following *thagi*.<sup>44</sup> Such mobility does not denote great wealth, nor does his monthly salary as *zilladar*.

Dhoosoo stated that after one expedition he stayed at home for two months, "...cultivating in my fields, for I rented three or four bighas of land, chiefly however, as a blind to conceal that I was a Thug, and to make a show that I was a cultivator".<sup>45</sup> Even if it was so, he can be seen as another *thag* jemadar apparently drawn from this stratum of 'peasant-landlords'.

There is an example of a *thag zamindar*. Rambux said he was a *zamindar* in the Company's provinces, in the Furruckabad district:

"If I had not wherewithall to pay rents to the (E.I.) Company, and owed two hundred Rupees revenue, I would get it from Thuggie on the roads, and not from a banker, why should



I steal it! I know not how to steal, but I have learnt Thuggie, and would get the money that way!"<sup>46</sup>

The context for this comment was the distinction six "approvers" (King's evidences) made between *thagi* and stealing. Futteh Khan said, "What God gives us, He gives us in thugie; God is the giver, we never steal!"<sup>47</sup> For Rambux, *thagi* was a culturally acceptable way of augmenting the revenue demanded from him as a *zamindar*. For the itinerant poor, on the other hand, *thagi* could be an option in times of dire need, or could provide a form of military employment.

I turn now to present some cases from Etawah and Agra districts, and the British-Maratha frontier in central India, to show how *thagi* and *dakaiti* (extractive or punitive raids within the region) could escalate into armed resistance to new and more vigorous colonial intervention. Here we see the connection between what I have outlined as two types of rural politics. The context is the East India Company's attempt to implement its agrarian policy, collect land revenue, make the frontier secure, and extend its judicial power into the countryside.

With territorial control the East India Company gained the right to assess the amount of revenue to be paid, to "settle" with those whose duty it was to collect it and to ensure that they paid it. The decision not to pay revenue had clear political consequences. In the frontier district of Etawah in 1808, Ruggool, recently the *zamindar* of Balteegurh near Shekoabad "contemptuously" resisted the process of the collector and the process of the Zilla Court, directing him to deliver up the possession of his "estate" to Bugwunt Sing the *malguzar*. The acting judge recommended military force in the event of further resistance. Apparently Ruggool had frequently plundered the neighbouring landholders, and "burnt their houses with impunity..." His house at Bulteegurh was surrounded by a mud wall, and he was said to have between forty and fifty armed followers.<sup>48</sup> It seems that it was now Bugwunt Sing the *malguzar* who was now responsible for revenue payment, and that Ruggool had been displaced by him. However Ruggool was not prepared to abide by the decision of collector and judge, and plundered the neighbourhood with his followers. While it is not clear whether these raids precede or follow his displacement, this example shows how one ex-*zamindar* could place himself beyond the law, retreat behind mud walls, and go forth with his followers to raid the district.

The details concerning a *dakaiti* in Etawah district in 1809, show the connections between a *zamindar* with three or four mud forts and his brother with a *garhi* (fortified house), and their sepoy, horsemen and villagers. The leader of the *dakaiti* apparently used money from the raid to redeem some land he had mortgaged to the *zamindar*. It seems he was a sepoy of the *zamindar*, and the latter was charged. The agrarian context of *dakaiti*, patronage, and armed resistance to some attempted arrests, emerges clearly

here.<sup>49</sup>

The *pargana* of Sindhouse in the Chambal region on the border between British and Maratha territory provides a third very interesting example. Part of the interest lies in the clash of perspective between *zamindars* and British. Halhed in an early report wrote:

Of the 16 villages of Purhuarha, Sindous Khass Birauree, Bindowa, Huruowlee and their huglas [sic] were, 'till my arrival the resort of a species of robbers denominated by the zumeendars who protect them and participate in their spoils, their sipahees or soldiers; by the rest of the world Thugs; ...."<sup>50</sup>

Sindhouse became important for British account of the spread of *thagi*: Sleeman wrote of the "old Sindouse families" of thugs,<sup>51</sup> and F.C. Smith wrote of their "headquarters" in *pargana* Sindouse, and Halhed's attack which "dispersed" them in every direction.<sup>52</sup> However the main interest of Sindhouse lies in the link between crime and patronage, and in the resistance these largely Rajput communities showed to both Maratha and British overlords. Even though the *pargana* fell within the region ceded to and conquered by the British between 1801 and 1803, its position seems to have been somewhat anomalous, and a surveyor was instructed not to give any cause for suspicion amongst frontier "chiefs".<sup>53</sup> However as late as 1812, Halhed wrote that Sindouse should be considered "hardly conquered". No civil officer of the government had been to the interior of the district; Law reached Sehson on the Chambal River, "but hearing of the determination of the inhabitants to resist him, [he] returned ...." The situation of revenue affairs there was as "equally deplorable" as that of the police, and "until the zumeendars agree to a settlement... the police department will be far from improvement...."<sup>54</sup> The British hold over the people of Purheeha was fairly tenuous:

They have constantly refused a settlement, they have ever placed every obstacle in the way of the teshildar, /for no European revenue officer has yet dared to go among them, /they always have opposed by force the measurement of their lands, and they have turned out and ill treated the shaunus placed over their crops. They have consequently obliged the officers of government to endeavour to realize the revenue by Khaum Tuhseel.<sup>55</sup>

*Kham tehsil* was a method of revenue collection direct from the peasants, when the zamindar would not come to terms.<sup>56</sup>

Halhed reported that the sixteen villages of Purheeha were controlled by four "head zamindars" and his view of the local polity is very striking:

These sirdars are absolute, their relations and brethren are the actual zumeendars, and the power they possess under the feudal system, the whole population being armed and the face of the country adapted to their mode of fighting,

renders them almost invincible....<sup>57</sup>

Halhed estimated that the sixteen villages of Purhwarha including Sindhouse, contained 7500 potentially armed inhabitants who could rely on 8500 to 14500 allies from the Maratha states<sup>58</sup>: a total of as many as 22,000 available to fight British attempts to make a land settlement, collect revenue and set up the police. Halhed's figure of 7500 combatants, which is more than double a later estimate of Purhwarha household population, is probably exaggerated, but it does indicate the potential for resistance.

Purhwarha and Sindouse at this time are noteworthy for other reasons as well. The Maratha *raja* Madhu Singh had been responsible for paying annual revenue of Rs 8000 for *taluka* Purhwarha up to the end of 1807-1808. His position was now eroded by the new revenue settlement between the British and the village *zamindars* with an annual increase of revenue of Rs 500. These *zamindars* apparently wanted troops to be sent "to dispossess Mohdo Sing of his forts at Sindousee..." Madhu Singh petitioned, agreed to the revenue assessment and to the introduction of police, and promised obedience to government orders.<sup>59</sup> Then in April (?) 1810 he evacuated his fort at Sindouse, where apparently there had been a garrison of 250 men, and now the British were free to make a "permanent settlement" with the "original proprietors", and to introduce police in the *pargana*.<sup>60</sup> A police darogah and his "establishment" took over the fort, and were authorised to make any small repairs which seemed necessary for its security. With police power extended to a part of the country which had long been "the residence of the most desperate offenders", there was some prospect they would now be speedily caught.<sup>61</sup> These offenders were the ravine-dwelling "Tugs and morauders [sic]" mentioned by Law in 1809.<sup>62</sup> The installation of the darogah into the *raja's* fort is a potent symbol of the intrusion of colonial rule into this region. The *thags* were to be the next target.

However the British still met resistance. In 1812 a British-led detachment of infantry attacked "Suntokh the son of the rebel Lolljee" in a village near Sindouse on a high bank of the Sind river, and surrounded by ravines; the "rebel gang" fled under fire; it was said that Lolljee had been in the village and that amongst those killed were "a notorious Thug chief, two Musslemen jummadurs of banditti and some of Lolljee's adherents who have fled from the Company's dominions."<sup>63</sup>

In another extraordinary incident, in October 1812, Halhed the assistant magistrate and his party were fired upon in Sindouse, and Maunsell (a British officer) and two others were killed.<sup>64</sup> As a grim retaliation and warning, Popham reported that "the extensive village of Murnaee in the Mahratta country", near where Maunsell had been killed by its former inhabitants "who were accomplices of the rebel Lolljee" had been "burnt and destroyed" without opposition:

"I have employed people to level every house-wall with

the ground, and shall cause the site of the village to be ploughed over with jack-asses in the plough which has been generally supposed to deter people from building near the spot again. I have warned the zeemeendars of the neighbouring Mahratta villages that it is my intention to destroy every village that shall give refuge to the rebel Lolljee or any one individual of his party..."<sup>65</sup>

Popham also reported that he had been informed that the "Maharaja" (Sindhia) was "very anxious to have the people within his frontier punished, as his authority over them has been little more than nominal."<sup>66</sup> Popham captured Lolljee and "through the interference of the resident at the court of Dowlut Rao Scindea" seven others (including three leaders) who were involved were handed over to Perry.<sup>67</sup>

Sindouse provides an indication of resistance on the colonial frontier, and the nature of the response, amounting to the obliteration of a village in independent Maratha territory. By early 1813 military "Pioneers" had been retained in *pargana* Sindouse to construct "a road which might admit the passage of artillery into that district..." a measure from which the Adjutant General expected the future "security and tranquillity" of that part of the *zilla*.<sup>68</sup>

The British sought to bring pressure to bear on the frontier region of Sindouse through the Maratha court at Gwalior, pressure which Sindhia apparently was keen to apply. The British were not averse to conducting punitive military operations in Maratha territory after Maunsell was killed in Sindouse.

This material shows how rural crime and conflict, conducted by landlords or their followers, could escalate into armed resistance, as the colonial rulers intervened directly or through a client state on the frontier. These three cases exemplify, I think, aspects of the feudal paradigm. In section IV, I discuss how mud forts and an armed population caused some colonial officials to think of the feudal analogy as well.

Even though *dakaiti* was widespread in Bengal, for historical reasons the agrarian context was somewhat different by the early nineteenth century. The Company had collected land revenue there since 1765; there had been a steady commercialisation of crops such as indigo; and private landownership had been introduced with the Permanent Settlement of 1793. There are cases of "dacoit" attacks on *mahajans* - money-lenders who might acquire land.<sup>69</sup> Violence connected with indigo cultivation is also a different feature. In Nadia district in 1808, for example, the house of a European indigo planter was attacked by between 120 and 150 "dacoits" after he and his watchman gave information to the magistrate which led to the capture of a "dacoit" leader. The links between "dacoits" and villagers, as well as their resistance to the attempt by the magistrate and 35 sepoys to catch the attackers, are similar to the type of escalation seen in north-west

and central India at the same time. However, it is important to note the agrarian overtones in the attack on the planters house, in which property worth Rs 5000 was stolen; the planter and three others were wounded, and one of his servants was "cut to pieces"; and two of the outhouses were "fired."<sup>70</sup> While it was the arrest of the "dacoit" leader which probably sparked the attack, their target and the resistance of both villagers and "dacoits" seems to indicate elements of the third type - rural protest. Perhaps there are also signs here of "social banditry".

### III. *From the plough to horses, sticks, swords and guns: ideas of deference and symbols of power.*

This section deals with the attraction which some peasants and artisans felt for violent life on the move, as thieves, mercenaries or bandits, in north and central India in the early nineteenth century. From their depositions after capture, it emerges that criminal expeditions were often launched in times of need, for example when a landlord could not pay revenue, or perhaps when a poor labourer felt the effects of famine. As well as providing profit or subsistence, however, many obviously enjoyed a more military life on the roads. I am interested in the way the military idiom could not only enhance status, but also provide temporary freedom from hard work behind the plough. While members of these roving bands showed deference to their leaders, they were also evidently proud of their martial lifestyle and accoutrements. For peasants and the itinerant poor, sticks, swords, guns and horses were symbols of power and status.

In 1820, for example, a person calling himself Raja Mihrban Sing of Gour in Awadh, moved through the country in regal style, with two hundred followers, and women being carried in "*doolees and palkees*" (pananquins). There had been an attack on a treasure boat on the Ganges in Bihar, by two parties of "dacoits" with guns, swords and spears, and a very large sum was stolen. The joint magistrate of Monghir later received news, suspected that the *raja* and his followers were robbers, and sent government troops who were successfully resisted by Mihrban's brother in thick jungle. When Mihrban was caught, he said he was a *zamindar* from Awadh on pilgrimage with his followers, but he and other prisoners were convicted of either having committed or been accessories to the dacoity.<sup>71</sup> While the British regarded Mihrban and his followers as dangerous *dakait*s (Shighalkhor, Budheks or Sear Murwas) Mihrban presented himself as a *raja* on pilgrimage with his retinue. An attack on a treasure boat would obviously help finance such a large-scale expedition.

In the earliest group of statements and confessions by *thags* which I have found, dated 1810, the deponents reveal interesting details about their lives, their means of livelihood and their links with criminal leaders. These ten *thag* deponents were mostly of low-ranking castes. The two main occupations which emerge from the depositions are agricultural labour as "cultivators", or

"service". Kalee Khan's description of them and his position in the group is significant:

"...all the asames [peasants, or 'tenants'] who are present are my associates; and I am their master and leader."<sup>72</sup>

There are other links between these individuals: some shared *jamadars* (leaders) or *thag* "teachers"; or lived in the same village previously, or were related.

Gholam Hossyn, the 16 year old *manihar*, gives a vivid account of life on the move, going from patron to patron looking for "service". The important stages of Gholam's life were as a *thag* victim (his father was killed), *thag* adoptee, then personal service for a number of patrons. Gholam went to obtain service with his uncle: he had served others but his active involvement in *thagi* developed out of links of kinship and service.<sup>73</sup>

Kalee Khan, of *darzi* (tailor) "caste", says he was formerly Hindu, and when 11 years old, was caught by the army of Nawab Numdar Khan, when he became a Muslim; then for 20 years he remained at Furruckabad, then went to relatives of his own caste who lived at Needhana in *pargana* Kasgunge. Some time later he went into the service of Kulander Buksh, where he became acquainted with Jewahir, a *thag* and the leader of a body of horsemen.

Kalee Khan mentions the criminal technique of *thagi* (strangling and cutting), and the murder of "many a man of property". He apparently served under a number of *jamadars*, and at one stage was employed for eleven years as a cultivator, then for another year "cultivating our fields..." At another time he went to where Meer Khan's army was camped.<sup>74</sup> "Service" to military patrons provided the context for Kalee Khan's *thagi*, and he too shows how service could be interrupted by a long period of agricultural labour.

For some other deponents, *thagi* was a response to dire need. Sooleman (alias Chilumsha) was a Muslim and lived in Tuddyeywarra in "Ellaka Beejapoor". He was "a cultivator by profession" but had been a *thag* for the previous three years, and his father had been "a sepoy in the Nizams service...". He was first employed in "cultivating land", and when there was a famine Moheeoodeen Buddaree gave him a rupee and said he would give him more if he went with him. Sooleman agreed and about three years before, went with Moheeoodeen Buddaree and joined "the gang of Thags" of three *jamadars*.<sup>75</sup>

The occupations of these *thags* reflects two major options available for this stratum of small peasant, artisan or landless labourer in this region of India at the outset of territorial colonial control: agricultural work or military service. Subsumed under "service" was *thagi*.

The depositions are available only in translation, but on one occasion at least, the British official left the original Hindustani

word for "service" in the text. Futtu Khan the deponent related:

"I, and my constant attendant Rumzan Pugla, proceeded in the cold weather to Fyzabad in search of service (chakuree),..."

In what appears to be a gloss, presumably added by Paton to show that "service" was really a euphemism for "thuggee", the text continues:

"... that is, plunder by murder;..."<sup>76</sup>

Futtu Khan evidently referred only to "chakuree", under which form of military employment he seems to subsume acts of *thagi*. Of great interest here, however, are the meanings which Rajputs in Rajasthan in the Mughal period attached to the terms *cakar* and *cakri*. *Cakar* generally meant "servant", and referred to what Ziegler calls "clients" outside the ruler's immediate family, but including Rajputs both within and outside the ruler's own clan and brotherhood. In Marvari usage, the word *cakar* referred to a "military retainer" who held rights over certain villages in return for providing arms or military service to his superior, or being part of his "patron's" household. He acknowledged his obligations by swearing a vow before a *devata* in a temple. In return, the "patron" ruler had to protect his "client", and had to give him land or other remuneration. Ziegler argues that this institution of "clientship" superseded kinship as the basis of organisation in Rajasthan. What is more striking is that *cakri* or *seva* signified service to the *thakur* – either himself a god, or a ruler who had acquired his kingdom through devotion and service to his duty.<sup>77</sup> The vows of service, and the parallel between service to the lord and service to the deity, brings us directly to Kosambi's argument that:

"... *bhakti*, unflinching loyalty to a god... suited the feudal ideology perfectly. Loyalty links together in a powerful chain the serf and retained to feudal lord, baron to duke to king."<sup>78</sup>

Thus, by subsuming *thagi* under *cakari*, Futtu Khan points to what I see as important features of the feudal paradigm.

I argue that the expeditions of *thags* and *dakaitis* could enable the itinerant poor or wealthier peasants to enhance their status. It is important to note here, the symbols of rank and power which they temporarily gained through *thagi*, or even through *dakaiti*.

From Shaik Inayut's deposition, it seems that his father's main occupation was "service". He said that when he was about 18 (about 27 years before giving the deposition) he went with Daood his father on *thagi*, "which was his trade.":

"He said 'come with me my son, and let us go on service together.' I was proud to accompany him on what I considered to be his vocation, and he gave me a very handsome pony of great value to ride [and?] as this was my first expedition, it was thought necessary to consult

the astrologers as to the best time for setting out, and he appointed the day..."<sup>79</sup>

They lived then in the village of Oja Jugmolee in Gwalior (a central Indian state adjoining the colonial frontier). On the appointed day he set out on the southern road with his father, "mounted on my fine pony, attended by two servants, Man Khan and Munnoo, as grooms..."<sup>80</sup> He was so pleased with the country and his company on the road that while his father went home "with his gang" and "returned two or three times to the Duckun [Deccan, southern region] in his annual Thug expeditions..." he himself continued on the move with the jemadars for two and a half years; they committed murders and gave him a "liberal share of the booty" but he was not allowed to participate "as strangler or holder of hands..."<sup>81</sup>

Such a life on the move was certainly more lucrative, but part of the attraction seems to have been cultural as well: to ride a horse, to carry weapons and to have grooms in attendance could denote the high military (or even "knightly") status of Muslim noble, or of a Ksatriya or Rajput.

Lukha, aged about 45, provides an even clearer indication of this in his deposition. He and his father were: "...Rajpoots of the Solinkee caste, and have been called Budhuks, since we took to the trade of robbery."<sup>82</sup> About 25 years before he "cultivated some land" in a village in Hutrus; as a result of an argument with his father he went to his brother-in-law Medeea (a jemadar, leader) who lived in the village of Hutteesā, where Man Sing "a very noted leader of Budhuks" also lived. Lukha continues:

"Man Sing asked me, why I condescended to be a drudge at the plough, while I might get so much more by following my brother-in-law and avoid the continued disputes in which I was engaged with my father.

I was captivated with their discourse about dacoitees, and determined to join them - Shortly after, in the season of Harvest/March/Man Sing and Medeea set out in the disguise of travellers with fifteen followers armed with swords, and matchlocks, and proceeded to Naeagon [?], five cose west from Mohan in Oude - I accompanied them in the merchant's shops or in the suraes [inns]..."<sup>83</sup>

Lukha told a story about his forebears, some of whom were formed into a regiment of Wuzeer Alee, and when the regiment dispersed, "Some took to tillage, and some to service; and some took to dacoitee - Those who took to tillage and service were by degrees induced to join the dacoits, from seeing their happier condition." His father then went to various places and "subsisted by tillage and service, and he never took to dacoitee..."<sup>84</sup> He also refers to other forebears who "subsisted upon service and tillage."<sup>85</sup> Lukha thus neatly presents the options for his relatives: tillage or service; but in comparison to the drudgery and servitude of



the plough, there was the mobility, enhanced image and material gains through banditry.

This is not to suggest that *thagi* and *dakaiti* were necessarily very "social" forms of banditry in Hobsbawm's sense. While I cannot here provide details of their victims (some of whom were quite poor themselves) it is important to note that recruits to a violent life, often with better pay and higher martial status, could also become virtually mercenaries in the pay of a local landlord. Ramzan was a *thag* approver (or King's evidence) who said that through the influence of his friends, he was taken into the service of a *zamindar* named Molvee Tahawur Allee, who made him a "Zillahdar", gave him Rs 4 per month as salary, and entrusted him to collect the annual land revenue of Rs 3000 from five villages containing three thousand people.<sup>86</sup> Ramzan obviously enjoyed his rise in status. As the deputy of the molvee who heard disputes, he could summon people to his "presence" and make them stand or sit:

"... I dressed well, rode my pony, and had too [sic] Sipahes to attend me a Putwarree or scribe, and a Gorait or village guard."

He says it was a good service for three years, that the molvee and the villagers were "well pleased" with him, and that he paid each village a monthly visit and no one suspected that he was a *thag*.

"The chief men used to wait on me to transact business, and I was supplied with fowls, mangoes, (when they were in season), fresh milk, & c. and as I passed along old and young made their salam to me".<sup>87</sup>

He says during this service he got leave for a month and went on *thagi* once with a gang of six *thags*; he left the duties of zillahdar to his friend Bucktawur while he was away. He returned for three months as zillahdar, but from fear of being seized as a *thag*, he fled to Dunowlee where Phoonda his uncle was *zamindar* of a very large village. Through his uncle, and accompanied by his cousin Jean, he made his salam to Raja Surat Sing of Dunowlee, who appointed him to collect the revenue of Sapore and Dunowlee on a monthly salary of Rs. 3. The land was ten miles in circumference, and in those villages there were more than two thousand men "whom I could at any time call to my presence for purposes of collection". To collect the revenue fifteen armed men were placed under his orders. He described the *raja* as a "mighty man" with five or six elephants, four hundred soldiers, and a fort with one or two cannons; and refused to allow officers of the Oude Government to enter his fort. Ramzan was traced as a *thag* after six months there. Paton's order to the *raja* for his seizure evidently induced the *raja* to advise him to surrender, which he did.<sup>88</sup>

"I was fully armed - a sword, shield, pistols, a matchlock and a flint gun, for I was fond of being thus arrayed, and

when so armed feared not though forty men stood before me."<sup>89</sup>

While Ramzan's weapons and retinue conferred status on him he was clearly working on the side of local authority and not against it.

It is important to note here the *raja's* and Ramzan's symbols of power and status. Ramzan's position also illustrates the way in which *thagi* was enmeshed in a fragmented polity, often marked by forcible revenue collection within the magnate's domain, and by armed resistance to central control. The other point here is that the British tried to eradicate *thagi* beyond the frontier by urging central powers like the Nawab of Awadh to control the local magnates who protected *thags*, or by applying more direct pressure from the Residency, as Paton did in the case of Ramzan's *raja*.

I would argue that for these nineteenth century deponents, *cakari* was still imbued with an ideology both of service to the military or criminal leader, and of martial pride. A significant change, however, was that *cakari* now depended not on an allocation of land, but on a share of the spoils. In a formal sense, *thag* and *dakait* expeditions were extractive, but they enabled landlords to augment their power and revenue, and peasants or artisans to possibly enhance their status and eat better at least. To this extent, *thagi* and *dakaiti* seem to illustrate well aspects of the feudal paradigm.

As a final indication that cash was not the only currency for transactions between *thags* and landlords, a deponent named Shahadut said that he lived in Heera Singh's *taluka* for twenty years, and he used to give him:

"Horses and arms, he used besides to receive a chote from all the T'hugs who consisted of about 30."

There were seven or eight (*thag*) houses in Bowsas village, where Khunja used to live, and the two *zamindars* also used to receive a "chote": "It is the custom with all the *zemindars*".<sup>90</sup> The "chote" is probably the *chauth* of the Marathas - the share in revenue or booty they took from their territories. While some *thags* denied they gave such a payment, this transaction shows how *thags* expressed their deference through tribute, and how the *zamindar* augmented his wealth. At another level, the giving of horses and arms, symbols of martial strength and status, shows how *thagi* was part of a political idiom and structure which in some respects seem quite "feudal".

#### IV. Colonial polity towards rural elites in India: the discourse on feudal power.

In his classic study of Rajasthan, Tod wrote:

"...there is a martial system peculiar to these Rajput states, so extensive in its operation as to embrace every

object of society. This is so analogous to the ancient feudal system of Europe, that I have not hesitated to hazard a comparison between them..."<sup>91</sup>

Tod remarked on "...the curious coincidence between the habits, notions, and governments of Europe in the Middle Ages, and those of Rajasthan ..." He thought that each system was based on the "patriarchal form" rather than one borrowing from the other.<sup>92</sup>

In stark contrast, Mill observed in his *History of British India*, published earlier than Tod's volume:

"Such a thing as a feudal system or a liege lord, never had a moment's existence in India, nor was ever supposed to have, except by a few pedantic, and half-lettered Englishmen."<sup>93</sup>

This is an ironic comment, because Tod was an orientalist scholar as well as a political officer, and James Mill neither knew an oriental language, nor went to India. The divergence between them represents much more than the differences between "orientalist" and "anglicist" scholarship or cultural policy. The different views of Tod and Mill about feudalism in India reflect two broad areas of administrative concern: on the one hand questions of government and the political security of the Company, and on the other, questions of revenue settlement, political economy and economic policy.

This section briefly considers how ideas about feudalism were often explicitly or implicitly part of the colonial discourse on the rural elite in India.

In my view, the function of rent- or revenue-collecting intermediaries and local magnates within the Company's frontier, and of regional powers beyond, posed an important problem for the colonial administration in India. Was it best to grant local elites private property rights in land, turn them into rent-receivers, and strip them of their "feudal" powers, as in the Permanent Settlement of 1793 and other legislation, or to exclude them as parasites from later revenue arrangements made directly with peasants? Were regional rulers to be seen as members of a fallen but loyal aristocracy, or were these client states to be brought under direct British rule?

The Permanent Settlement of 1793, which "permanently" fixed the amount of revenue to be paid henceforth by Bengal *zamindars*, was a measure which had a significant social impact, and fuelled much official debate. W.W. Hunter wrote:

"It was vain to expect the ancient *rājās* of Bengal, encumbered with all the costly paraphernalia of their petty courts and military retainers, to suddenly transform themselves into punctual tax-collectors. Yet this was exactly what the Permanent Settlement did expect of them....

The ancient houses of Bengal broke down under the strain....

The Permanent Settlement became a success only after it had erected a new and shrewder class of landholders on the ruins of the ancient aristocracy of Bengal."<sup>94</sup>

Malcolm, writing from a similar perspective, approved of the so-called ryotwar (peasant) and village revenue settlements, whereby if "a raja, thakur or zamindar" existed he would retain his authority, but not "when extinct":

"What similarity have such a grade in the Indian community to our manufactured zamindars, whom we create from a sense of policy, and destroy from a sense of justice?"<sup>95</sup>

Malcolm and Hunter seem to draw implicitly on the feudal analogy here. The Benares Circuit Judge was more explicit when he reported on "village frays" in 1809. This activity was: "... strongly characteristic of the feudal system and uncivilised nature of the inhabitants."<sup>96</sup> We have seen in Section II how Halhed described the power of the zamindars and the armed population of Purheeha in terms of the "feudal system". Similarly, in the part of Awadh which the Company acquired between 1801 and 1803, the British were confronted by mud forts, refractory landlords, armed peasants and bandits. Beyond the frontier the *nawab* was under constant pressure to control this same group of forces, who raided the Company's districts also, but was given limited support by the British to do so. It is interesting to note how the feudal analogy enters the colonial discourse in Awadh in the early nineteenth century.

The Company applied pressure on the *nawab* by diplomatic means through the British Resident at Lucknow. The position of Bentinck, the governor-general, becomes clear with the statement that the "king" (*nawab*) knew that unless he effected "a reform", he would not have British support, which Bentinck maintained was as necessary to maintain his position against "former advisers and minions, as to enable him to subdue the great rebellious feudatories in opposition to the government".<sup>97</sup> This was Bentinck's formula: without "reform", no British support; without British support, the king could not resist his "feudatories".

I can only briefly mention some of the political implications here. The case of Awadh shows how "refractory" *zamindars* with mud forts, cannons and armed retainers could resist the *nawab*, who then sought assistance from the Company. Taking the story only as far as 1832, by which time there was some improvement, we see that the British continued to support the *nawab* without direct intervention, and that by then the *nawab* had been able to regain control over local zamindars and villagers. However colonial pressure on Awadh continued and culminated not in military intervention but in outright annexation in 1856.<sup>98</sup>

The case of the *nawab* shows how the British rulers in India sought to create, rather than destroy, an Indian aristocracy which would be docile, and loyally serve the interests of the company and later the Raj. The *nawab* was called the King of Oudh, and

was painted wearing what looks like a crown.<sup>99</sup> The British not only circumscribed his power, but invested him with a regal symbol taken from medieval Europe. After the annexation of Awadh in 1856, the last *nawab* reluctantly accepted a state pension.<sup>100</sup>

After the events of 1857, the colonial rulers sought to win over many *talukdars* of Awadh, and sought to forge links with them as members of a loyal aristocracy.<sup>101</sup> Perhaps the event which best sums up the British attempt to transform the Indian idiom of power, and substitute a "Victorian feudal" one instead, was the Imperial Assemblage in Delhi in 1877. At this modified *darbar*, Cohn argues that the British sought to represent their authority over a loyal feudal aristocracy, who would be vested with banners showing their coats of arms, as symbols of their position under the Raj.<sup>102</sup>

#### Conclusion:

My approach to the question of how far early colonial India can be seen as "feudal", has been to look at the ideas and activities of landlords, peasants and artisans in a specific region. But this in turn raises other questions about the nature of the colonial impact, and the place of *thags* and *dakaitis* within a broader process of the consolidation of the colonial state in rural areas, and changes at local and regional levels.<sup>103</sup> Bayly has argued:

"If the dynamic changes in Indian commerce and politics provided much of the force behind the British advance, they also limited its impact and formed its character."<sup>104</sup>

Yet from the mid-eighteenth century, in addition to commercial penetration, colonial rule was both coercive and extractive. Stokes refers to the heavy revenue demand following annexation in 1801-1803, and to some changes which occurred despite agrarian resilience.<sup>105</sup> However, more than resilience, there was resistance. Siddiqi's perspective on this is pertinent. Whereas the British had success in their first two decades, against a pattern of local plunder, and refusal by *zamindars* to pay revenue, earlier powers did not:

"Cases of such resistance, which must have been typical of the rural scene in the late eighteenth century, suggest that the inability to bring the village *zamindars* to terms probably lay at the root of the political and financial weakness of the Indian ruling powers."<sup>106</sup>

Put simply, the regional powers were unable to collect the local agrarian surplus.

This brings me to the question of the link between banditry and state-formation. Hobsbawm in his classic study has argued that the rise of the mafia in nineteenth-century Sicily "marks a transfer of power in the 'parallel system' from feudal to rural middle class, an incident in the rise of rural capitalism."<sup>107</sup> He rejects a view of the mafia's code as being linked to feudalism, and he sees no definite line between mafias (plural) and social

banditry.<sup>108</sup> Blok is more concerned with private violence, and with the rise of *mafiosi* as "violent peasant entrepreneurs" who mediated between a largely feudal peasant society and the modern State. He argues that bandits needed political protection to be successful, and that they became drawn into a suppression of the peasantry.<sup>109</sup> Also relevant here is Ranajit Guha's striking distinction between two codes of violence: crime/insurgency; secretive/open; small-group/mass; total/partial; and destructive/appropriative.<sup>110</sup> He writes also of the "grey overlap between codes" within a more general motif of "ambiguity".<sup>111</sup>

I would argue that *thagi* in particular seems to hover between crime and protest, social and anti-social banditry. As we have seen, within their communities they might be called soldiers, but as unknown assailants on the roads they were known as *thags*. They themselves spoke of *thagi* and *cakari*. *Thags* and *dakaitis* were part of the local resistance which persisted under early colonial rule, and to that extent they contributed to the emergence and consolidation of local domains.<sup>112</sup> Some *thags* apparently gave a Maratha-style *chauth*, but I would argue that this extractive mechanism was probably less important than the subsistence and spoils which group members gained for themselves during an expedition. (Some *dakaitis* on the other hand gained huge amounts from raids.) Thus while Gough refers to "the Thuggee" within the category of social banditry (some as mercenaries)<sup>113</sup> their range of victims, and their integration into local power structures suggest something closer to Blok's model.

While the consolidation of colonial rule in nineteenth century India is in some ways analogous to the growing control over the south by the north during the formation of modern Italy - in Gramsci's view this "hegemony" serves as a territorial version of the relationship between town and country<sup>114</sup> - there are some differences, especially concerning the place of *thagi*.

During the nineteenth century, the colonial authorities assessed the criminality of various groups, and increasingly stigmatised many of these as "criminal castes and tribes".<sup>115</sup> It seems that mercenaries became more obviously involved in maintaining the power of local officials and landlords.<sup>116</sup> *Dakaiti* made the transition to the twentieth century as a type of gangsterism, occasionally with overtones of social banditry.<sup>117</sup> It would be interesting to explore further the links between the commercialisation of agriculture, the arrival of new landlords, rent-receivers and planters, and the employment of *lattials* and those "nuqdees" as retainers.<sup>118</sup>

As for *thagi*, the loose, mobile network of people who often referred to themselves as having been on "service", but who also might acknowledge being "*thags*" in the sense used by villagers, was damaged by the arrests from the 1800s, and was evidently broken by the operations of Sleeman and his assistants from 1829. *Thagi* (as it emerges from the depositions cited in this paper)

had cultural and political trappings drawn from the rural society of northwest and central India. After the colonial crackdown, *thagi* in this particular guise seems not to have re-emerged in the changed political environment of the later nineteenth century. Within this region, the practice of drugging victims and then robbing them was often associated with *thagi*, but elsewhere, as in Bengal, such poisoning with *dhatura* and robbery does not appear to have been called *thagi* by villagers or authorities. In Bengal, people used other words such as *bangu* (Sleeman's "bungoo") to describe theft on the rivers.<sup>119</sup>

It is worth noting that *thags* appear in popular stories, such as those concerning Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh religion, as people who rob and kill travellers. Sajjan had built a temple and a mosque to lure travellers into his house, kill them (by throwing them into a well) and take their possessions; in one version he had links with a local *raja* who usually got half of his booty. An important element in the naming of Sajjan as a *thag*, is the fact that he used an outward show of piety to deceive his traveller victims.<sup>120</sup> While *thags* performed rituals on the expeditions, the idea of *thagi* as a murdering cult was developed by British officials who had questioned their prisoners.<sup>121</sup>

Another aspect of my paper has dealt with the symbolism of power and status in *thagi*, and this analysis could be taken further. Here I would note Guha's exploration of insurgency in "the highly semioticised world of traditional India",<sup>122</sup> which has yielded rich and impressive results. Looking more closely at these symbols, people on *thagi* expeditions could carry weapons, and even as retainers they would probably enhance their status. With *dakaitis* this seems less likely, since a *lathi* (stick) was merely a symbol of power. It would be worthwhile to look more closely at the role of the landless in rituals connected with the practice of *thagi*, since this would raise the question of caste, and whether they themselves would ride a horse, or would still be "grooms". I suspect that on the whole, *thag* groups merely reproduced broader hierarchical relationships between landlords, peasants and artisans. Although this awaits further analysis, I would say that in terms of point (4) of the paradigm proposed earlier in this paper, *thagi* and *dakaiti* continued to operate in a political and cultural domain, where conflict between landed and landless did not yet appear as class conflict. But while *dakaiti* adapted to later social and political conditions, *thagi* (in the form described by some participants) seems not to have survived the crackdown by Sleeman's department and other authorities. Here I should add that although there were many rebellions and other acts of protest in nineteenth century India, these are beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>123</sup>

A *thag* deponent once said, "We only thug from necessity, not from pleasure; it is a fearful business - at home we have no fear of detection, but on the road we are in anxiety." On another occasion he also said, "... Thuggee is a 'Shikar' (a hunt), sometimes successful, sometimes not."<sup>124</sup> Not all *thag* deponents would

have agreed with him, but these statements indicate a blend of need and martial sport. I would argue that the political and cultural contours of *thagi* and *dakaiti*, such as the move from plough to horse and arms, can illustrate aspects of the feudal paradigm in early colonial India.

*Acknowledgments:*

I am very grateful to Soumyen Mukherjee and John Ward for their helpful advice, editorial skills, and patience. My thanks also to Max Harcourt for his stimulating commentary on my paper; to Craig Reynolds and Jonathan Kenna for their helpful comments; to all those at the conference who raised questions; and to Mrs Margarita Alonso-Love and Garry Curry for typing drafts of the paper. Again, to Gill, thanks.

*Note:*

The spelling of Indian words has generally followed the form used in the records. I have not used diacritical marks in transliteration, and anglicised forms do not appear in italics (e.g. *thag/thug/thuggee*). When quoting from MS. sources, the original punctuation has been retained, but capital letters have generally been dropped.

Please note that the terms "*thag*" and "*dakait*" (to which the English "s" has been added for the plural) refer to people, and "*thagi*" and "*dakaiti*" refer to their practices. In this paper, I have used the current Hindi spelling of "*dakait*", which the British anglicised as "*dacoit*". Some other forms also in use, are "*daku*" (Hindi and Bengali) and "*dakat*" (Bengali). In current Hindi and Bengali usage, "*thag*" can refer merely to a cheat or imposter. (Cf. the *Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary*, Calcutta, Sahitya Samsad, 1968, 1980, pp. 510, 518; and *Bhargava's Pocket Dictionary (Hindi-English Edition)*, 11th edn., Varanasi, Bhargava Book Depot, 1979, pp. 118, 120, 121)

*Abbreviations:*

AAGG	Assistant to the Agent of the Governor-General
BCJC	Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations
BL	British Library, London
CHCRO	Calcutta High Court Record Office
<i>For. (misc.)</i>	<i>Foreign (miscellaneous)</i>
H(T&D)	Home (Thagi and Dakaiti) Department
IOR	India Office Records, London
JCP	<i>Judicial Criminal Proceedings</i>
NAI	National Archives of India, New Delhi
PAAGG	Principal Assistant to the Agent of the Governor-General
<i>Paton Coll.</i>	<i>Paton Collection</i> , BL/Add. Ms. 41300
WBSA	West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta



## NOTES

1. On this point, see e.g. Asiya Siddiqi, *Agrarian Change in a Northern Indian State*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973; pp. 10-11. See also Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707)*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1963.
2. The word "Chakuree" appears beside "service" at one place in the translation. See Futy Khan's narrative (trans.), taken by James Paton, Lucknow (Residency), 7 July 1837; in W.H. Sleeman, *Report on the Depredations Committed by the Thug Gangs of Upper and Central India*, Calcutta, G.H. Huttman, Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1840; p. 173. Sleeman became Commissioner for the Suppression of Thuggee and Dacoitee, and Paton was an Assistant to the British Resident in Lucknow in "Oudh", and did work for Sleeman's department. Sleeman published from Paton's manuscript a number of these depositions in his *Report*, and the full range of translated depositions taken by Paton can be found in BL/Add.MSS. 41500/*Paton Collection*. In this instance, cf. *ibid.*, fols. 137b-138.
3. See e.g. the "Geneological Tree" of "Budhuk Jagheerdars" in Ulwar, in J. Graham to Sleeman, 26 May 1840; NAI/H (T & D)/D-1(8); pp. 9, 20-21.
4. It is possible to make comparisons here with interesting points in other papers, e.g. John Ward's comments on retinue-formation, centrifugalism/centralism, and "the employment of techniques of informal, personal power in times of competition and crisis"; and also Nicholas Wright's view of soldiers, and "the criminal vagabonds who drifted in and out of service", and "war in society". Max Harcourt made some interesting comments on my paper, such as his reference to the mafia, to moral communities, and the "feudal idiom of politics." In a helpful comment on my first draft, Craig Reynolds urged me to clarify my use of the term "feudal".
5. See E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester, U.P., 1959; 3rd ed. 1971, 1978; esp. ch.2; and Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 1969; Penguin, 1972, esp. ch.1; also refs. to 'dacoits', esp. pp. 20n, 100-101. Incidentally, Kathleen Gough has described "the Thuggee" as social bandits; see Gough, "Indian Peasant uprisings", in A.R. Desai, (ed.), *Peasant Struggles in India*, Bombay, Oxford U.P., 1979: 85-126; pp. 103-106, 119n.
6. On various aspects of the model/experience dichotomy with reference to feudalism, see especially papers by Craig Reynolds, John Ward, Soumyen Mukherjee and Colin Jeffcott. Cf. E.R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*, 1954; The Athlone Press/Humanities Press Inc., London and New Jersey, 1964, 1977; pp. 285-88.
7. Cf. John Ward's Focus Va.

8. For the classic account, see Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, L.A. Manyon (trans.), 1961; 2nd ed., London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4.
10. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, David Fernbach (ed.), Penguin, 1973, 1981; pp. 67, 68. See also Marx, *Early Writings*, Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (trans.); Penguin, 1975, 1981; p. 255.
11. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, David Fernbach (trans.), Penguin, 1981; pp. 298-99.
12. Many references, see esp. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ben Fowkes (trans.), Penguin, 1976, 1982, p. 716; see also Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' in *Early Writings*, esp. pp. 322-34.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 319; also p. 318. Cf. Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London, NLB, 1974, 1979; pp. 403-404.
14. Marx, *Capital* 1, p. 875; see also Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1939; Martin Nicolaus (trans.), 1973, 1977, esp. pp. 497, 498; also *Early Writings*, p. 318.
15. Daniel Thorner, 'Peasant Economy as a Category in Economic History', in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, Penguin, 1971, 1979: 202-18; p. 217.
16. Cf. E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*, 1962; New York, Mentor, n.d., p. 184. Soumyen Mukherjee made a similar point in conversation.
17. See e.g. Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, Cambridge, U.P., 1965; Narendra Krishna Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. 1, 1956; 2nd ed., Calcutta, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961; esp. chs. IX and X.
18. Albert Soboul, "Persistence of 'Feudalism' in the Rural Society of Nineteenth-Century France", in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, (eds.), and Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum (trans.), *Rural Society in France*, Baltimore and London, the Johns Hopkins U.P., 1977: 50-71.
19. Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Permanent Settlement in Operation: Bakarganj District, East Bengal" in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, Madison, Milwaukee and London, Wisconsin U.P., 1969: 163-74; pp. 171-74.
20. Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1, Penguin, 1966, 1975, pp. 241-53; Ram Sharan Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c. 300-1200*, University of Calcutta, 1965; see esp. pp. 1, 4-5, 53-59, 74-75, 87, 94, 118-34, 228, 263-73; D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1970, 1976, p. 17; see also pp. 12, 23-24, 195-97; and Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, Popular Book Depot, 1956; esp. pp. 275-76, and chs. 7-10. Cf. my B.A. (Hons.) thesis, "Brahmins, Kings and Land in Early Bengal", Sydney

- University, 1977.
21. Anderson, *Lineages*, p. 19; George Dalton, *Economic Systems and Society*, Penguin, 1974, 1980; p. 81.
  22. See e.g. Marx, *Capital* 3, pp. 450-51.
  23. Thorner, "Peasant Economy", pp. 216-17.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
  25. Anderson, *Lineages*, pp. 401-403; 413-61.
  26. V.I. Pavlov, "India's Socio-Economic Structure from the 18th to Mid-20th Centuries", in Pavlov et al., *India: Social and Economic Development (18th to 20th Centuries)*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1975: 7-92; p. 92; see also pp. 57-73, 99-92.
  27. C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, Cambridge, U.P., 1983; esp. pp. 194-95; also pp. 146-51.
  28. A huge topic, but see e.g. works by P.J. Marshall, Benoy Chaudhuri, H.R. Ghosal, N.K. Sinha, Asiya Siddiqi, K.N. Chaudhuri and K.P. Mishra.
  29. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Delhi, Oxford U.P., 1980; also Stein in Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of India: I: c. 1200-c.1750*, Cambridge, U.P., 1982; pp. 20, 104-105.
  30. Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1899, 1976; pp. 872, 1205. See also Kosambi, *Introduction*, pp. 279-80.
  31. On the "warrior-ruler model of the Ksatriya", see David G. Mendelbaum, *Society in India*, 2 vols. 1972; pp. 452-55; also p. 594. See also the very interesting article by Surajit Sinha, 'State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India', *Man in India*, 42 (1962): 35-80; also Dumont's reference "Ksatriyaization" and "Rajputization" in reference to Sinha's article; Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 1966; London, Paladin, 1972; p. 369.
  32. Bayly, *Rulers*, p. 50.
  33. Suprakas Ray, *Mukti-Yuddhe Bharatiya Krsak [The Peasant in the Indian Freedom Struggle]*, Calcutta, Bharati Book Stall; rev'd. ed., 1980; p. 1. My thanks to Parimal Ghosh for referring me to this book.
  34. M.R. Kale (ed), *Hitopadesa of Narayana*, 1896; 6th ed., Delhi, Banarsidass, 1967, 1976; Sanskrit text, pp. 85-86; Kale's trans., p. 99.
  35. Monier-Williams, *Dictionary*, pp. 743, 748.
  36. J. Law to G. Dowdeswell, 13 Oct. 1808; IOR/P/129/50 BCJC 4 Nov. 1808 (37).
  37. Max Harcourt's commentary on my paper, 18.3.84.
  38. Cf. Ranajit Guha's provocative article, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II*, Delhi, Oxford U.P., 1983: 1-42.
  39. Putty Khan's deposition (trans.); Sleeman, *Report*, p. 159.
  40. *Ibid.*, pp. 159, 163.

41. See e.g. *ibid.*, pp. 126, 155, 156, 158, 159, 160, 161; see also BL/*Paton Coll.*
42. For a view which stresses the religious aspects of the "Thag Brotherhood", see Gustav Pfirrmann, "Religiöser Charakter und Organisation' der Thag-Brüderschaften", Ph.D. Thesis, Eberhard-Karls-Universität zu Tübingen, 1970. See also material on *thags* and ritual in W.H. Sleeman, *Ramaseeana, or a Vocabulary of the Peculiar Language Used by the Thugs...*, 2 Vols, Calcutta, G.H. Huttman, Military Orphan Press, 1836; and BL/Add. Ms. 41300, *Paton Collection*; on rituals connected with Hindu kingship, such as the ritual military procession, see Ronald Inden, "Ritual, Authority, and Cyclic Time in Hindu Kingship", in J.F. Richards (ed), *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1978: 28-73.
43. Ramzan's deposition (trans.), taken by Paton, 20 Jul 1837; Sleeman, *Report*, p. 139, and pp. 143-44.
44. Ramzan's deposition (trans.), 17 Jul 1837, BL/*Paton Coll.* fols. 153b-155b; Sleeman *Report*, p. 126 (n.d.); also *ibid.*, pp. 129, 131, 141.
45. Dhoosoo's narrative, 6 Jul 1837; *ibid.*, p. 165; see also p. 153.
46. Rambux's deposition (trans.) Sept 1836; BL/*Paton Coll.* fols. 23b-24.
47. Futtel Khan's depositions (trans.), Sept. 1836, *ibid.*, fol. 23b.
48. J. Law, acting judge, to G. Dowdeswell, Mienpooree, zilla Etawah, 5 Mar 1808; IOR/P/129/43 BCJC 18 Mar 1808(7); paras 1,2; see also BCJC 8 Apr 1808 (33-39).
49. T. Perry, acting magistrate, Agra to G. Dowdeswell, 15 Dec 1809; also various enclosed depositions; Dowdeswell's order; WBSA/JCP/12 Jan 1810 (23-26).
50. N.J. Halhed, asstt. mag., zilla Agra and Etawah, "Report on the state of the Pergunnah of Sindouse, commonly called Sehson Purhearha, from actual observation", Camp Sindhouse, 18 Oct 1812; IOR/P/131/9 BCJC 12 Dec 1812(72); para. 2.
51. W.H. Sleeman PAAGG to J.C. Wilson AAGG Etawah; Saugor, 2 Jun 1834; NAI/H(T&D)/G(2); p. 188. See also e.g. Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, pp. 222-25.
52. Smith to Chief Secy. to Govt., Jabalpur, 20 Jun 1832; in C.H. Philips (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 2 vols., Oxford, U.P., 1977; vol. II, p. 836.
53. Dowdeswell to Sackville, 6 Apr 1810; IOR/P/130/15; BCJC 27 Apr 1810(23); para 1; Sackville to Dowdeswell, 16 Apr 1810; *ibid.* (24); paras 4,5.
54. Halhed to Dowdeswell, 10 Oct 1812; IOR/P/131/9 BCJC 12 Dec 1812(71); paras 1,9.
55. Extr. from Halhed's letter, 18 Dec (?) 1812; in Perry to Dowdeswell, 16 Dec 1812; IOR/P/131/11 BCJC 2 Jan 1813(19);

- para 16.
56. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Change*, p. 62.
  57. Halhed, "Report on... Sindhouse..."; Camp Sindouse, 18 Oct 1812; IOR/P/131/9 *BCJC* 12 Dec 1812(72); paras 4,5.
  58. *Ibid.*, paras 6-9.
  59. Law to Brooke, 10 Dec 1809; encl. in Perry to Dowdeswell, 16 Mar 1810; IOR/P/130/15 *BCJC* 27 Apr 1810(20); para 1.
  60. *Loc.cit.*; Perry to Dowdeswell, 5 May 1810; IOR/P/130/16 *BCJC* 19 May 1810(8); para 2.
  61. Perry to Dowdeswell, 5 May 1810; paras 1-5.
  62. Law to Brooke et al., 10 Dec 1809; IOR/P/130/15 *BCJC* 27 Apr 1810(20); para 1.
  63. Popham to Fagan, extr. from Military Dept. Proceedings 24 Dec 1812; IOR/P/131/11 *BCJC* 9 Jan 1813(45).
  64. Halhed to Dowdeswell, 30 Oct 1812; IOR/P/131/9 *BCJC* 12 Dec 1812(81); Perry to Dowdeswell, 17 Dec 1812; IOR/P/131/11 *BCJC* 2 Jan 1813(41). See also Dowdeswell to the "Register" of the Nizamut Adawlut, 31 Dec 1812, *BCJC* 2 Jan 1813(42), and reply; *ibid.*, 9 Jan 1813(43,44).
  65. Popham to Fagan, 14 Nov 1812; extr. Milit. Dept. Progs. 24 Dec 1814; IOR/P/131/11 *BCJC* 9 Jan 1813(45); para 1.
  66. *Loc.cit.*
  67. Popham to Perry, 3 Dec 1812; IOR/P/131/9 *BCJC* 19 Dec 1812(65); Perry to Dowdeswell, 8 Jan 1813; IOR/P/131/11 *BCJC* 23 Jan 1813(29), para 2; Dowdeswell's reply, *ibid.*, (30).
  68. Fagan to Gardiner, 19 Jan 1813; extr. Milit. Dept. Progs. 13 Feb 1813 (no.254) (17); IOR/P/131/13 *BCJC* 27 Feb 1813(53).
  69. An example from 1835; High Court Record Office, Calcutta, Nizamut Adalat Mss.
  70. Shakespear to Dowdeswell, 29 Sept 1808; IOR/P/129/49 *BCJC* 1 Oct 1808 (19).
  71. Cases in the Nizamut Adawlut (Criminal Court); Govt. against Mihrban and 162 others, charged with Dacoity, etc., 12 Dec 1821; IOR/V/22/441; pp 125-139 and appendix A; p. 125. Lukha mentions Mihrban, Pasee and Chedee as jemadars, and Gareeba refers to Mihrban and his followers and bearers; NAI/H(T&D)/D-2(4)(vol.); pp. 163, 167, 167f., 266.
  72. Kalee Khan's deposition (trans.) encl. Perry to Dowdeswell, 24 Apr 1810, IOR/P/130/10 *BCJC*, 11 May 1810. In modern Hindi, *asami* means "tenant"; Bhola Nath Roy (ed), *Bhargava's Pocket Dictionary (Hindi-English Edition)*, Varanasi, 11th edn., 1979; p. 16.
  73. Gholam Hossyn, "acknowledgement" before Perry, 11 Apr 1810; encl. in Perry to Dowdeswell, 11 Apr 1810; IOR/P/130/15 *BCJC* 27 Apr 1810(4).
  74. Kalee Khan's deposition (trans.), encl. in Perry to Dowdeswell, 24 Apr 1810; IOR/P/130/16 *BCJC* 11 May 1810 (56).

75. Deposition of Sooleman alias Chilumsha wd. Moheeoodeen (trans.), before J. Hale, Poona, 16 Aug 1836; NAI/H(T&D)/D-2 (3) (vol.); pp. 48, 49.
76. Futy Khan's narrative (trans.), taken by Paton, Lucknow Residency, 7 July 1837; Sleeman, *Report*, p. 173. The gloss is clear in Paton's MS., which actually reads: "... in search of service (chakuree, that is plunder by murder!) ..." Cf. BL/Paton Coll., fol. 137b.
77. Norman P. Ziegler, 'Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties during the Mughal Period', in Richards (ed.), *Kingship*: 215-251; pp. 225, 234.
78. Kosambi, *Culture and Civilisation*, p. 208. See also Inden, "Ritual" in Richards (ed.), *Kingship*, p. 35.
79. Deposition (trans.) of Shekh Inayut ("Inagut" in MS.); NAI/H(T&D)/D-2 (1) (vol.); p. 111 (later pagination).
80. Loc.cit.
81. Ibid., pp. 111-12.
82. Lukha's deposition (trans.); 15 Sept 1840; NAI/H(T&D)/D-2 (4) (vol.); pp. 155, 158. (The word which I read as "Solinkee" seems to be misspelled as "Sohwkee" here in the MS.) Croke derives Badhak or Budhik from Vadhaka (Skt.) "a murderer"; see W. Croke, *The Tribes & Castes of the North-Western Province & Oudh*, (1896) 1974; 4 vols; I, p. 100. See also W.H. Sleeman, *Report on Budhuk, alias Bagree Decoits ...*, Calcutta, Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1849.
83. Lukha's deposition (trans.); 15 Sept 1840; pp. 155-56.
84. Ibid., pp. 157-158.
85. Ibid., p. 157.
86. Ramzan's narrative (trans.), taken by Paton, 20 Jul 1837; Sleeman, *Report*, pp. 143-44.
87. Ramzan, *ibid.*, p. 144.
88. Ibid., pp. 144-45.
89. Ibid., p. 146.
90. Shahadut's deposition (trans.).  
It is worth noting that Gordon sees *thagi* mainly in terms of state-formation in eighteenth century central India, and the conspiracy theories of later officials: Stewart N. Gordon, "Scarf and Sword: Thugs, Marauders, and State-Formation in 18th Century Malwa", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 6 (1969): 403-29.
91. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, 2 vols., 1829, 1832; revised edn., Calcutta, S.K. Lahiri & Co., 1894; vol. 1, p. 119.
92. Ibid., p. 121.
93. Quoted in S. Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India*, Cambridge, U.P., 1978; p. 161, note 70.
94. W.W. Hunter, *Bengal MS. Records*, Vol.I, London, W.H. Allen, 1894; in the introductory "Dissertation", pp. 100, 114. There is an extensive literature on the Permanent

- Settlement. Two excellent studies can be mentioned. One deals with the debate beforehand (in which ideas on feudalism play a part), and the other deals with the Permanent Settlement in the context of later administrative policies and outlooks: Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, Paris and La Haye, Mouton, 1963; Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1959, 1963.
95. Malcolm to Wynn, Bombay, 19 Apr 1928; in Philips, *Bentinck Correspondence*, I, p. 27.
  96. Smith to Dowdeswell, 28 Dec 1809; WBSA/BCJC, 12 Jan 1810 (27); pp. 253-54.
  97. Bentinck's Minute, Shimla, 30 Jul 1831; NAI/For.(misc.) 261; p. 178.
  98. See Nawab's letter (trans.), (= 31 Jul 1824); NAI/For.(misc.) 181; p. 247. See also Nawab's note (trans.) (= 5 Jun 1831); NAI/For.(misc.) 183(l); pp. 583-84; Low to Prinsep, 9 Nov 1831; NAI/For. (misc.) 236; pp. 558-60; Low to Bentinck, 9 Jun 1832; *Bentinck Correspondence*, II, p. 833; and Low's memo to Bentinck, 13 Jun 1832; NAI/For.(misc.) 184, pp. 831-34.
  99. See e.g. paintings of the nawabs Ghazi ud Din Haidar and Nasir ud Din Haidar, done by Lucknow artists in 1814 and 1831, in Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, Urdu c.1913f; E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (trans. and ed.), London, Paul Elek, 1975; facing p. 176. Concerning the title of "King", see also *ibid.*, pp. 54-56.
  100. John Pemple, *The Raj, the Indian Mutiny and the Kingdom of Oudh 1801-1859*, 1977; Delhi, Oxford U.P., 1979; p. 253.
  101. Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1965.
  102. See the excellent article by Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, U.P., 1983, 1984: 165-209.
  103. I have not attempted to discuss the significance of urban growth under colonial rule. On Calcutta, see e.g. two stimulating articles: S.N. Mukherjee, "Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-38", in Edmund Leach and S.N. Mukherjee (eds), *Elites in South Asia*, Cambridge, U.P., 1970: 33-78; and Barun De, "The Colonial Context of the Bengal Renaissance", in C.H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright, (eds), *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernisation c. 1830-1850*, University of London, SOAS, 1976: 119-25.
  104. Bayly, *Rulers*, p. 464.
  105. Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj*, Cambridge, U.P., 1978: 63-89; esp. pp. 88-89.
  106. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Change*, p. 10.
  107. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, p. 38.
  108. *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 32; ch. 3.

109. Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village 1860-1960*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1974; esp. pp. xxviii, 8-9, 99-102, 213-30. Note here Wallerstein's comment: "It would.. be a serious error to see banditry as a form of traditional feudal opposition to state authority"; see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, New York and London, Academic Press, 1974; p. 143; also pp. 142, 196.
110. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi, Oxford U.P., 1983; pp. 79, 109; also p. 193.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 82, ch. 3.
112. On *thags* and state-formation in 18th century Malwa, see Gordon, "Scarf and Sword".
113. Gough, "Indian Peasant Uprisings", in Desai (ed), *Peasant Struggles*, pp. 103-106, 119n.
114. Cf., Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds. and trans.), *Selections from the Prison Note Books of Antonio Gramsci*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, esp. pp. 70-71, 90-102.
115. See e.g. C.R.W. Hervey (comp. and ed.), *Reports and Returns Relating to the Crimes of Thuggee and Dacoity ... with Reports on and List of Wandering Tribes*, Bombay, Education Society's Press (for the Government), 1858.
116. E.g. various statements by Dowlut Singh Jemodhar, at Hingolee, Dec 1850; NAI/H(T&D)/C-1(4); esp. pp. 504, 518-19.
117. See e.g. Guha, *Peasant Insurgency*, for references to Corbett's account of Sultana; pp. 78-79, 90, 110. For some stories of *dakaiti* in Bengali, see e.g. Khagendranath Mitra, *Banglar Dakat [Dacoits of Bengal]*, Calcutta, Sisu Sahitya Pracar Sangstha, 1977; Yogendranath Gupta, *Mahim Dakat, [Mahim the Dacoit]* c. 1945; Calcutta, Saibya Pustakalaya, 1979; and Yogendranath Gupta, *Banglar Dakat*, 3rd edn., Calcutta, Saibya Pustakalaya, 1978. My thanks to Devleena Ghosh and Hena Basu for these books; Hena also kindly translated some passages from *Mahim Dakat*.
118. For a reference to "nuqdees", see HCRO/Niz.Ad.Mss.; Jungle Mehals, Progs. 12 Feb. 1833 (3 & 4). The term "nuqdee" apparently referred to a type of retainer. On lattials, see e.g. Chittabrata Palit, *Tensions in Bengal Rural Society*, Calcutta, Progressive Publishers, 1975; pp. 89-92.
119. Sukumar Sen, " 'Bungoo' - River Thugs on the Hooghly", *Bengal: Past and Present*, 86 (1967): 167-68.
120. W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1968; esp. pp. 38-41; 58-59, 76-77, 93, 117-19; also his *Early Sikh Tradition*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1980; esp. pp. 65, 122-23.
121. While McLeod states that the word *thag* refers in these stories to any "highwayman or violent robber", he states: "In its strict sense the word *thag*, or *thug*, designates a member of the cult of ritual murderers who strangled and



- robbed in the name of the goddess Kali." (*Guru Nanak*, pp. 38-39, n.) There is no need to embellish the loose, popular view of *thagi* with the colonial view of a murdering cult. However, it is important to note that officials could draw on the ideas of *thag* deponents about *thagi*, and on their references to rituals, and their own devotion to the *devi* (goddess).
122. Guha, *Peasant Insurgency*, p. 164.
  123. For Guha's views on the ambiguity between crime and insurgency, see *ibid.*, esp. ch. 3. It is also interesting to consider how far Guha's motif "territoriality" refers to features which in other contexts might be called "feudalism". See *ibid.*, ch. 7.
  124. Dhoosoo's narratives (trans.), taken by Paton, Lucknow, 6 Jul 1837 and 24 Jul 1837, in Sleeman, *Report on Thug Gangs*, pp. 153, 165.



*Sydney Studies in Society and Culture, No. 1*

# Words and Worlds

## Studies in the Social Role of Verbal Culture

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