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Farmers' movements and cultural nationalism in India: An ambiguous relationship

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How do the New Farmers' Movements relate to cultural and political nationalism in India today? The farmers' agitations and communalism – Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh – represent the two major kinds of social and political mobilizations in the past two decades in India that have come to influence national politics. The former type of movement is largely represented by democratically oriented, secular-interest organizations in the context of an increasingly state-directed capitalist agricultural economy. The latter, by contrast, are ethnic (cultural and political) movements that seek to damage the multi-ethnic character of the Indian state and society by attempting to enforce a social order based on particular religious and cultural values. This might lead one to believe that the two types of movements are completely at variance with each other, and that the strengthening of democracy would depend on the progressive development of secular interest organizations like the farmers' movements, whilst the increased proliferation of cultural identities and movements, on the other hand, would thwart efforts at secular mobilizations and democratic decision-making in a multi-cultural society.

The relationship, however, is more complex than that and varies considerably from region to region in India. The farmers' movements cannot avoid articulating some kind of cultural identity commensurate with the ideological currents of their target populations in various parts of India. The way this is done determines their relationship to cultural nationalism, and their ability to combat it in a progressive democratic way. Can recent development of social movement theory help us understand why? In this article, I show that it is necessary to combine various recently developed approaches to reach a comprehensive understanding.

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The magic of movements

There is something magic about social movements. Like the fishermen at the Sea of Galilee, men leave their nets and everyday concerns for a new life and work, the consequences of which they know little of in advance, but which may ultimately change the very world they were born into. The unexpected and unpredictable occurs, whether you like it or not. People change and the world is changed in the process and with it the knowledge that was once taken for granted. There is something magical about politics too. When powerful politicians, in an apparently stable political and economic structure, exploit and try to manipulate various sentiments of a population divided by class and creed, they sometimes unleash powerful forces and processes of which few are masters but many are victims.

The seemingly unpredictable is particularly evident in the way culturally based political conflicts have developed in India over the last decades. Travelling through Punjab in the mid-seventies, who could have imagined that this prosperous state would be involved in a deadly civil war 10 years later? When Indira Gandhi and the Congress party in the early 1980s extended support to a practically unknown fundamentalist priest Bhindranwale, in order to split the growing Sikh regional party, the Akali Dal, it let loose social and political forces that they themselves could hardly anticipate, and one of whose early victims turned out to be Indira Gandhi herself. Until recently, Sikh nationalism had become one of the strongest cultural or ethnic movements in India, which through its demand for an independent nation state, Khalistan, was threatening the stability of the Indian Republic.[1]

To many observers the growing tide of Hindu nationalism is equally appalling. After the division of the continent at Independence and the assassination of Mohandas Gandhi, Hindu cultural and political mobilization receded into relative oblivion only to reenter the scene gradually from the 1970s onwards. Today, Hindu nationalist forces count their members and sympathizers in the tens of millions and challenge the established political system and policies in a major way.[2] When thousands of villages send bricks to a small town named Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh to build a Rama temple on the site of a Muslim mosque, the Babri Masjid, and when thousands of soldiers have to be posted to protect it (who in the end failed to prevent the destruction of the mosque), something new and seemingly frightful appears to have happened to secular, democratic India. From having

largely coexisted peacefully for several centuries, Hindus and Muslims now find themselves in fatal opposition.[3]

In contemporary India, Hindu nationalism is often referred to as fundamentalism, revivalism, or communalism. These labels all capture some aspect of the phenomenon, but may at the same time be misleading. It is true that the Hindu nationalist movement mobilizes people on a particular religious issue, but its aim is to launch a political project at the national level, which is based on a broad Hindu cultural identity. Brass writes:

> Most important, however, has been the rise of a new ideology of Hindu nationalism, which has turned the official secular ideology on its head. The militant Hindu argument is that India cannot be a true secular state as long as Muslims are allowed to have separate personal laws, a University of their own in which Muslims predominate, are allegedly given special privileges, and occupy a state, Kashmir, with a special status in India. It is a great mistake to view this ideology as Hindu "fundamentalism." It is, like secularism in India, an ideology of state exaltation, which the BJP wishes to infuse with Hindu symbols in order that a united India may come to occupy a respected place among the great states in the modern world.[4]

The success of the Hindu nationalist movement over the last decade is manifested by the advances made by its main parliamentary political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).[5] In the last general elections, in 1991, the party managed to get 20 percent of all votes, and emerged as the most important political alternative to the Congress party, the party of national liberation, secularism, and the symbol of modernization and development in India.[6]

Farmers' movements

Equally important, in sharp contrast to these "cultural" movements, are a number of secular social movements that have a strong influence on the contemporary political and cultural situation. These include the farmers', the environmentalists', and women's movements, of which the farmers' movements have probably had the most widespread and profound impact.

Since the early 1970s the new farmers' movements have become one of the most important non-parliamentary political forces in India. From one state to another, farmers have formed organizations to struggle for better economic conditions in an increasingly commoditized agricul-

tural economy. Their main target has been the state which intervenes in the agrarian economy by supplying agricultural inputs and regulating the markets. The farmers demand higher state subsidies on inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, electricity, and water. They also demand lower taxes and debt relief. Likewise, they demand higher prices for their products, such as grains, cash-crops, vegetables, and milk. They argue that the terms of trade between industry and agriculture are increasingly favoring industry as against agriculture.

The farmers' movements began in Tamil Nadu and Punjab in the early 1970s, and later spread to Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh (UP), and some neighboring regions. Today the most important movements are the Shetkari Sanghatana in Maharashtra, and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) in Punjab and western UP.[7]

Their central message is symbolized in the simple and powerful slogan: *Bharat against India*! Bharat is the indigenous name for India, and carries positive connotations, while India is its westernized version, symbolizing exploitation. The former corresponds to the rural society, economy and culture, the latter to the westernized, urban-industrial counterpart. Sharad Joshi, leader of the farmers' movement in Maharashtra, explains:

> The real contradiction is not in the village, not between big peasants and small, not between landowners and landless, but between the agrarian population as a whole and the rest of the society.[8]

The strong populist appeal has enabled the mobilization of the broad rural masses, but this should not be taken to mean that the farmers' movements equally represent the interests of all rural classes and strata. Behind the appeal there is a definite class basis, of rich and capitalist farmers in alliance with rich, middle, and even poor peasants, who rally behind the movements because of their precarious position in an increasingly commoditized agricultural economy, in which prices on inputs and farm products are, to a very large extent, politically determined via state intervention. Rural laborers are only indirectly benefitted. To the extent that peasants and farmers gain, the basis for their claims for higher wages and better terms of employment expands.

In comparison to the cultural nationalist movements described above, the farmers movements appear rather prosaic. They all address the same problem, the economic position of agriculture within the Indian

economy as a whole. They pose simple questions related to the relative decline and impoverishment of peasants in the face of the growing prosperity of the urban world. They argue that because the number of jobs in industry and the public sector are not growing despite heavy state investments, more and more people have to subsist on agriculture and rural industries and crafts, which receive much less attention from the politicians.

The strength of the farmers' unions is considered by many to derive from their concentration on one single issue – the economic remuneration of farming. Some observers view them as economic interest groups much like trade unions or groups of employees in a particular industry.[9] But there is something more to these unions. The type of peasant mobilizations that have taken place clearly transcends the formal organizational life of interest groups in a fully developed industrial society. It has taken hold of vast groups of rural people belonging to diverse castes, religions, and classes and has grown into movements that challenge the existing state and the way politics and economic negotiations are normally transacted.

Thus, the unions carry something of the magic of a "new" social movement.[10] They have been considered by many observers to be the most important popular movements opposing the growing communal forces, be they Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim, or of any other cultural or ethnic hue. This is also how the farmers' movements view themselves. Interestingly, some of the most influential critics of the farmers' movements deny them this quality. Utsa Patnaik, for example, sees them as exponents of an ideology of capitalist landlords, in which:

> The ideology expresses itself in anti-industrialism, against state intervention, in an assertion of the "traditional" values of pristine "Bharat" against the modernizing efforts of the centralised state in industrializing "India" and carries with it both anarchist and reactionary elements, bears a family resemblance to the agrarian radicalism in interwar Japan.... It carries within it the potential for fascistization of the Indian policy.[11]

A more detailed analysis of the various regional movements (see below) shows, however, that the farmers' movements display great variations in their response to the nationalist movements with which I am here concerned. To take the regions where farmers' movements have been most active in the recent period: In Maharashtra, it seems to be a case of outright confrontation, with the Shetkari Sanghatana trying to combat the growing forces of Hindu nationalism; in Punjab, the

farmers' movement have largely identified with a reformist Sikh sub-nationalism (with the exception of one faction during the peak period of militancy from 1984 until 1991); in Uttar Pradesh, finally, we notice an accommodation with the Hindu agitation. These variations in response were there in spite of the fact that the farmers' movements profess themselves to be pursuing secular, interest-group politics in which the economic grievances and demands of their mixed ethnic and religious farming communities are being represented. How can we account for such variations in outcome?

How to understand variations in social movements

A natural approach to regional variations of a social movement would be to compare cultural and social structures and see if one could find systematic differences, which could explain the outcome. Recent developments in social movement theory, which look at processes rather than deterministic structures, provide us with more sophisticated tools. However, the way this is done differs considerably between contemporary scholars. One way would be to analyze variations in *political opportunity structures,*[12] in which, for example, the character of the political system and the presence or absence of allies and support groups could heavily influence variations between regions. According to this view, movements by their very actions also influence the opportunity structures in which they find themselves.[13]

Another approach would be to take a deeper look at the cultural construction of identity against the background of larger structural features and changes as central to the understanding of social movements.[14] An important place in this identity formation is given to the development of new knowledge, that is, cultural renovation in the understanding of the world, of social and material relations, and of the politics of organizing. This puts the searchlight on intellectuals and leadership in social movements, on the various discourses inside a movement, and on the public debate around it (mass media and its responses), as well as on traditions of knowledge and the use of these in various contexts.[15]

One approach that to me seems to represent an attempt to bridge the gap between the two approaches is to study the very process of social interaction in the formation and reproduction of social movements. Alberto Melucci has elaborated this aspect to suggest that a social movement is the product of continued tensions, negotiations, and cog-

nitive processes within a "multi-polar action system" or "composite action system', in which widely different means, ends, and forms of solidarity and organizations converge in a more or less stable manner. Instead of studying the product as such (the movement) one should study the process of interaction, negotiation, conflict, and compromise among a variety of different actors, which either succeed or fail to produce the unity of collective identities of movements.[16]

Does this mean that structural characteristics are not important? Certainly not, but while it is self-evident that social movements do not just grow out of political opportunities, cultural imagination, and social networking, it is equally true that the new emphasis on understanding the political, cultural, and interactional aspects of social movements has brought with it a much deeper and more refined understanding of various forms of collective action. What is important to keep in mind is the need for a combination of structural, cultural, and interactional factors in the analysis. I thus agree with Mario Diani and Sidney Tarrow, who think that social movement theory must combine contributions from various fields to be comprehensive.[17]

Social movements grow out of social contradictions and cleavages, but to understand how these structural features translate into collective action and social change of these very structures, one needs to apply a process-oriented perspective in which the analysis of cultural dimensions and social interaction plays an important role. Movements are specific combinations of political actions, cultural and ideological interpretations, and organizational forms. They are not just expressions or representations of given classes or social groups or cultural configurations, they also create social conflicts (out of a number of existing or possible contradictions), social relations, and culture in a dialectical way.[18]

Common ground: State policies, economic change, and cultural processes

When we look into the general political opportunity structures and cultural processes of the kind of social mobilizations with which we are concerned here, there at least three fields of inquiry that appear relevant. These are: 1) the way the colonial state has constructed ethnic communities in India and the way these have been used for political mobilization after Independence; 2) class relations and the political

economy of state led economic development; and 3) cultural renaissance in the context of dramatic social change in India today. In what follows I briefly analyze how these aspects are relevant to understanding the emergence of both farmers' movements and those of cultural nationalism.

While it is clear that each of these dimensions refers to a separate concrete reality, with its own theoretical discourse, it should also be clear that it is by combining these perspectives, that is, by analyzing the relations among economy, culture, and politics, that a wider understanding can be reached. Rather than combining them on an abstract level, however, we then proceed to look at the concrete combination of factors in the regional processes of social interaction and identity formation that make for the complex mosaic of contemporary Indian society. In the regional analysis we find some of the reasons for the very varied responses that farmers' movements have given to the emergence of extreme forms of nationalism in the 1980s, which run all the way from outright confrontation to active accommodation.

State and community

The political processes in and around the state can be understood as a power game around various projects, like nation building and development, or the dominance of a particular social class or section. The mobilization of support for and legitimation of these projects, as well as their dynamics, it must be analyzed in a wide historical context.[19]

The British colonial administration used communal elements in their "balkanization" policy of divide and rule. The process of politicization of cultural and religious communities in contemporary India, for instance, cannot be understood without reference to the way the British used and constructed caste, tribal, religious, and other communities in their administration of the empire. Access to land, resources, and legal codes were given to or preserved for these communities as collective units.[20]

A broad nationalist movement against British colonial rule, uniting almost all classes and communities, had been followed by the Indian National Congress. Since independence it has pursued a policy of centralized state-controlled capitalist development in the form of massive

public investments in infrastructure such as health and education, large-scale industrialization in the public and private sector, land reforms, and commercialization of agriculture. The Congress professes secularism and democracy in nation-building. Yet it relies on regional elites and patron-client types of mobilization including dominant but socially backward castes, scheduled castes, and religious minorities. However, with the Congress increasingly turning to regional but center-manipulated elites favoring certain sectors and communities, its general support and ideological base has gradually eroded. This is what happened in the 1960s and 1970s.

Thus, the Congress party in power inherited the colonial state constructed by the British, an efficient, centralized, and uniform bureaucracy, which is a repressive apparatus with colonially constructed communities as its clients. This has to be treated as a separate analytical entity in order to understand the strong bearing it has on collective action and politics in India today. Both farmers' agitations and cultural mobilizations can be viewed primarily as responses to the state system. Economic development, allocation of investments, and the distribution of wealth and poverty among sections and communities are important determinants of the political system and process.

World-system theorists such as Jonathan Friedman claim that it is the breakdowns in the strong world order and strong state systems, and of projects of nation-building and modernity, which give rise to or make room for pluralism and the proliferation of cultural and ethnic identities all over the world.[21] In India there is an interesting dialectic in this respect between strong state projects on the one hand and the breakdown of a stable order. What we witness is how the decline of the Congress-system of government has led to an increasing political manipulation of various cultural identities. Since the 1970s the Congress party has become increasingly populist, sharing with other political actors a kind of "competing populism," as Arthur Kohli has labelled it.[22] This, in turn, made room for communal appeals in the beginning of the 1980s, when the Congress party, too, starts to play on the cultural feelings, especially of those of the Hindu majority.[23] This has given increased legitimation to Hindu nationalism. A public political space, so to speak, has been opened up for it.

It is important to understand the differences that characterize these state-induced collective actions. The farmers' movements act upon contradictions inherent in the development policies of the Indian state,

which allegedly favor large-scale and capital-intensive industrialization, while the rural areas are perceived to be left with a growing population on dwindling natural resources, a situation that the Green Revolution alone cannot remedy.

The communities, on the other hand, act upon the way the state treats them as communities. A tribe that loses its traditional rights on land, access to common property, forest and grazing land, is a case in point. But such state practices are very complex, as can be illustrated by the system of affirmative action formalized in relation to the caste system and the tribes, the so-called policies for the reservation of jobs in government and seats in educational institutions. In this system the lower castes, once classified by the British administration as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and backward castes, have quotas for public employment and education and access to higher studies, as well as scholarships and other benefits. Castes and tribal communities have become organized as interest groups around these rights. The Hindu nationalist movement breeds on sentiments generated among the higher and middle castes toward the reservation policy.[24] To the extent that the farmers' movements are dominated by these castes there is a dangerous connection in this respect.

In 1980 a government commission, the Mandal Commission, suggested inclusion of new backward communities in the list of groups to be benefitted. Ten years later the newly elected National Front government declared its intention to implement such a policy. The National Front, however, depended for its rule on the parliamentary support of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Sensing the political opportunity, BJP engaged in massive communal agitations, with students burning themselves to death in public. These and other actions eventually brought down the National Front government.

As the regional analysis below show, the colonially constructed communities and the kind of state policies practiced toward them vary considerably between different parts of India. This has important implications for the relation between the farmers' movements and the cultural nationalists.

Economic changes and conflicts

The farmers' unions represent, as we have seen, a new kind of conflict in India, a conflict between the agricultural economy and the urban-industrial economy, which crystallized during the state-led economic development strategy, especially after the introduction of the Green Revolution in the 1960s. This conflict cannot be understood in traditional class terms.

Exploited by British colonialism, India developed into a dependent capitalist economy. With the growth of Indian industry a working class developed, and with it trade unions and political parties on the political left, as well as movements and parties of the emerging middle class. Indian agriculture, on the other hand, developed into a commercialized feudal economy dominated by landlordism and usurious exploitation in close alliance with the colonial state. In its wake followed radical peasant movements mobilizing landless laborers and a greater part of the peasantry against imperialist oppression. From the point of view of class, the core of the anti-imperialistic movements represented an alliance of the oppressed classes, including the Indian bourgeoisie.

Much has changed since then, but during the first 30 years of independence, these class formations continued to exert a profound influence on movements and political practice in India. The Indian economy was strong enough to pursue a fairly independent import-substitution policy, building up industries in the public and private sectors. Organized labor movements played an important role in this and succeeded in reaching quite favorable terms of employment for the growing labor force. In agriculture, land and tenancy reforms were undertaken by the state as a result of strong pressure from the radical peasant movements with support from the urban classes. In the course of time India increasingly became a land of small farmers, of poor, middle, and rich peasants (family farmers, relying mainly on their own labor for their subsistence). Landless laborers still existed in great numbers, as did capitalist farmers, landlords, and moneylenders. But the direction of change was somehow slowly toward more a egalitarian structure in the agrarian economy as compared to the colonial period. This is not to deny the vast inequalities and class cleavages that still exist in the rural economy, but merely to stress the egalitarian trend.[25]

Class relations are changing as a result of all this and becoming much more diversified and less clear-cut. In industry a reserve army of unorganized laborers outnumber organized labor, and live under conditions of severe poverty. The traditional trade unions appear to have become more or less irrelevant to these toiling masses. In rural areas and in agriculture, a relative poverty is shared by the poorer classes, whether landless, or with tiny plots of land. Laborers compete for jobs and trade unions face difficulties. However, in those areas where the Green Revolution has taken place via massive state support, employment opportunities have increased both in agriculture and non-agricultural spheres and wages have risen as a result.[26] Agricultural work is often performed by labor-gangs, who practice a kind of collective piece-rate bargaining.[27]

Except for a few areas like West Bengal and Kerala, where class movements have made a lasting impact on the political system anchored in strong communist movements, class-based movements of the traditional type have either stagnated or are on the decline. Other forces appear to have become more powerful. The farmers' movements as we have seen build on a new type of economic cleavage, the rural-agricultural as opposed to the urban industrial. The state and its development policies can be perceived as actively shaping this new economic relationship and providing a basis for the present politicization of the rural areas.

A tension between the farmers' movements and the Hindu nationalist mobilizations is quite evident. For the latter, the unity of the people involves transcending the rural-urban barrier. This naturally threatens the unity of the farmers' movements. The potential for a convergence of interest at the cultural level is absent at the economic level.

Cultural processes

Cultural identities are certainly not just given, neither by God nor by history. They are created, but how and by whom, by which forces in what structures and processes? Cultural and communal identities exist in a "context of oppositions and relativities."[28] So what is that context? What are the mechanisms and forces at work and how are they related?

Some of the self-evident determinants are the "inherited" cultural structures, already existing social and cultural identities and groupings

(codes of communities, etc.). However, rather than imbuing them with inherent eternal, essential, and stable qualities, one should see them as part of a cultural and social repertoire of potential groupings and identities, in which there is also much room for new combinations, imagined communities, and cultural innovations. Cultural identities are socially constructed.[29]

Paradoxically, the recent upsurge of various cultural and communal identities and movements in India, as elsewhere, can be seen within the overall logic of democratization processes.[30] It is when the traditional political identities based on inherited nationalist projects, various class groupings, and modernization projects are weakened that the alternative identities come to the fore within the overall context of democratization.

It is quite clear that in India today there are important processes of cultural modernization, which take the shape both of renaissance and of redefinition within the various cultural traditions. What we see as Hindu nationalism, or fundamentalism as it is often called, cannot simply be interpreted as reactionary movements. In these movements, as well as in Islamic fundamentalism, or in various new nationalist movements based on cultural, religious, and language difference, there is a strong element of cultural renovation in response to dramatic changes in social structure. In the background they are increasingly incorporated into a world of global mass communication, which transmits images of other societies and cultures, especially those of the West. Cultural movements address the problem of identity to individuals experiencing dramatic social change. Much of what in the West tends to be viewed as reactionary waves and a resurgence of traditional culture, in fact contain a great deal of cultural renaissance, of seeking new roots and identities by reformulating traditional values and world-views commensurate with modern existence. They "represent an attempt to cope with modernity."[31]

The success and strength of the cultural movements today exist in part because they take a positive attitude towards modern technology and the market economy. Theological concepts are weaned away from primitive forms of natural superstitions and made compatible with modern existence. They unite people previously divided into separate classes and communities, at the same time new definitions of one's own group vis-à-vis others also emerge. This reformulation in the ideological universe takes place in the main "meta-language" that the common

folk understand. It is a response to a changing life situation in a rapidly developing world, a world of winners and losers, where, for example, rural youth often find themselves at a disadvantage. In these movements there is thus a significant component of young people, unemployed youth, students, etc., who are attracted by the new message, which explains the world, gives hope of a better future, and offers them an active role in shaping their future.

It is important to understand that cultural movements may become vehicles of either oppression or emancipation, depending on the larger social and historical context within which they are placed and grow, and upon the social forces active in them. They do not exist in isolation from other social forces but always derive some of their characteristics or determinants from them.[32] Here it may be pertinent to recall the role of religious movements in the transformation of European societies from the sixteenth century and onwards. From the Reformation to the pietistic sects of the eighteenth century and the free churches of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, runs a thread of cognitive reformulation of spiritual relationships parallel to the changes in economic and political realms. To take but one example, after the dissolution of serfdom in Denmark at the close of the eighteenth century, the traditional communal relations of the peasants in the village weakened. They found a new community, however, in the growing religious awakening sweeping through Denmark with charismatic leaders like Grundtvig. This in turn formed a very important background to the formation of peasant movements, cooperatives, political parties and cultural movements from the mid nineteenth century onwards. It was in the new religious movements that the peasants learned how to build modern organizations, and these then became springboards for the more secular movements that followed.[33]

Thus, cultural movements, including the nationalist ones, are not by definition reactionary.[34] The reactionary wave of Hindu nationalism witnessed in India today is challenged by a variety of reformist, emancipatory, and even radical nationalist and cultural movements. Besides, the articulation of cultural identity is also strongly present in the so-called secular movements, such as the farmers' movements and the environmental movements. I next discuss the way this happens in the various farmers' movements in India.

Regional encounters

From the above analysis it should be clear that the farmers' movements and the Hindu and other cultural movements, whatever shape they take, do not represent a simple dichotomy of mutually exclusive opposites. Farmers belong to different castes and cultural communities, and are engaged in a profound search for new meanings and political expressions in a quickly changing world. Cultural nationalism, revivalism, and renovation is affecting them as much as any group in society. It is therefore not surprising that there is a great deal of ambivalence in the way the farmers' movements relate to cultural issues and politics. Use of Hindu identity to mobilize voters and supporters in a Hindu national project for example, does not leave the Hindu farmers of middle and higher castes unaffected. They too are drawn into the whirlwinds of communal politics.

Theoretically, therefore, we may expect any type of relationship between the farmers' movements and the extreme nationalist movements, from identification, via various kinds of accommodation, to clear-cut confrontation. This is also borne out by an analysis of the three regions in which the farmers' movements are most active today: Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab.[35] In this analysis we look at the economic background, the social composition, leadership, ideology, and cultural roots of the movements, as well as at the interaction among different groups, political alliances, and significant political processes. Variations in these to a large extent account for the considerable differences found.

Maharashtra

Founded in the late 1970s by Sharad Joshi, the Shetkari Sanghatana (Farmers' Association) of Maharashtra has had a deep impact both on the state and union politics.[36] Sharad Joshi is a former UN official, who worked for many years in the International Postal Union at Berne in Switzerland. On his return to India, after having taken up farming in Poona district, he spearheaded one of the most successful farmers' movements in India to date. Initially it very effectively concentrated on agitating for remunerative prices for one crop at a time – onions, cotton, and tobacco – attracting a massive following. Subsequently, the movement became much broader in scope, encompassing a number of issues such as ecological farming, womens' emancipation, and cultural reforms related to the development of rural society.

Shetkari Sanghatana is a modern type of organization, which, much like other new social movements, builds its structure around actions rather than routine functions. There are no fixed membership or set of rules, nor any strict bureaucratic hierarchy locating local, intermediate, and top-level functionaries in the organization. Anyone who wears the Sanghatana badge, participates in the agitations, or goes to jail is deemed a member.

In an intensive political dialogue with activists and intellectuals (also from other social movements), Sharad Joshi has developed a whole new world-view around this core.[37] His language and ideology are those of economic and cultural reform, in line with the Marathi social reformers like Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar, and their struggle against the caste system, as evinced in the Harijan and anti-Brahman movements.[38] Recently the emphasis on cultural reform has lead to the propagation of anti-Brahmin religious traditions.[39] This is why Shetkari Sanghatana probably represents the most powerful popular opposition to the Shiv Sena, the Maharashtrian variant of right-wing Hindu nationalism.

From his experience in Shetkari Sanghatana, Sharad Joshi gave an explanation on what propelled the "nationalist" wave. He referred to the Sanghatana activist who went to seek his fortunes in the urban areas ("India") and returned disillusioned (to "Bharat"). On his return to the Sanghatana, where he had earlier "found enough expression to his discontent," he now found it rather lukewarm. He then felt like doing something more fiery and with greater impact. Possibly he could find in fundamentalism a better outlet for all his pent-up feelings. This kind of experience recalls a number of past occasions in India, as in the case of the Moplah rebellion in Kerala, the communal frenzy leading to the formation of Pakistan, and the erstwhile secessionist tendencies in Punjab. It is from this perspective that one has to view the dissatisfaction in rural areas among farmers, starting essentially on economistic grounds, and then falling prey to the parochialists. Joshi observed:

> I am not worried about the economic opposition, or economistic opposition either from the left or from the right, but yes, if we had communal riots in the North, say starting in the next twelve months, then suddenly people become irrational. Everybody who just happens to be born a Hindu starts thinking of himself as a Hindu first, and everything else comes afterwards. And in that kind of a madness anything could happen, even a Gandhi couldn't prevent it. I don't know to what extent our farmers' organization would be able to do it.[40]

Sharad Joshi maintains that the rise of right-wing nationalist parties is connected with the changed attitude and policies of the Congress party – the tactics of using ethnic movements to split the opposition. On the growth of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra he complained:

> What stops the government from putting Bal Thackeray (leader of Shiv Sena) under the National Security Act when he makes speeches of that type? All his workers are people who collect money, I mean that's a sort of security racket, mafia, they go and collect money from all shop keepers, collect money from illicit liquor stores, etc.... If you want to be free of them you have to pay. It is protection money. Now, if the government wants, they can all be controlled within seven days. The government wouldn't like to do that however. It enjoys the situation, that right now for Sharad Pawar (the present Congress Chief Minister), nothing is more helpful than Shiv Sena, because the opposition gets splintered. So he would be encouraged. In fact, Vasant Dada (an earlier Congress leader who died) was responsible for most of this trouble, because he "resocieted" Shiv Sena in Bombay. And it is with the Bombay corporation money that they have been spreading.[41]

In 1991, a discussion on the communal issues with Sanghatana activists, revealed a deep understanding of the factors promoting Hindu nationalism and what the Hindu nationalists were thinking. Many activists, while acknowledging that Shetkari Sanghatana was more or less free of communal feelings, could not be sure that it would be in a position to contain communal passions if the "communal temperature" rose further. They felt, however, it could not last for long.[42]

Again the relationship between Shetkari Sanghatana and Shiv Sena is not exactly what one would expect from this. Even if Shiv Sena were to be branded as an enemy, there was still room for tactical considerations. In 1989, when Shetkari Sanghatana engaged in party politics and participated in the elections, Joshi declared:

> If all the opposition units come together in the National Front, as also the NCC (National Campaign Committee), and if they take Shiv Sena along with them and give them 15–20 seats, we would not disagree or disqualify that alliance from support, for the reason that Shiv Sena is in it. 15–20 seats, if that accommodation is made, we would be prepared to go with it. Go with it in the sense that that would not constitute an insurmountable hurdle in declaring a support to them.

Thus, Shetkari Sanghatana is a type of farmers' movement that, though it has distinctly distanced itself from the type of right-wing cultural politics that Shiv Sena represents, nevertheless, in its actual dealings, has found it necessary to make accommodations from time to time, even if limited in scope.

Uttar Pradesh

The independent farmers' movement in Uttar Pradesh (UP) is of recent appearance.[43] Before the middle of the 1980s, Lok Dal, a pro-farmer political party under the leadership of Charan Singh, dominated the agrarian political scene in the state to such an extent that a non-political farmers' union could not emerge on a wide scale. With the death of Charan Singh in 1987, the new leadership of Mahendra Singh Tikait of the erstwhile dormant Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) suddenly became very active. Forceful agitations for reduction in electricity tariffs, increase in procurement prices, or waiving of debts were staged in Uttar Pradesh and in Delhi, bringing Tikait and the BKU into the limelight. At present the movement can be regarded as one of the strongest amongst the farmers' movements in India. Though attracting a following from all the major farming castes in western Uttar Pradesh, it is under the traditional leadership of the dominant Jat caste. Mahendra Singh Tikait derives his leadership position also from his status as clan leader in the traditional organization of the Jat caste.[44]

When compared to the Shetkari Sanghatana in Maharashtra, BKU of Uttar Pradesh is a rather different kind of organization. It has a classical social movement organizational form with formal membership, annual fees, rules, boards with chairmen, secretaries, and treasurers at all levels from the village to the state capital. However, the ideology and practice of BKU is very traditional, invoking Hindu religious symbols and the virtues of traditional rural society. Laborers from lower and especially ex-untouchable castes are met with oppressive treatment. Wider social reform has little or no relevance in their agitations, and women have no role in the movement. Their roles are limited to those of housewives and servants. Clearly traditional caste relations and patriarchal relations predominate in Jat society.

When discussing the organization with its leaders and members it was found that they sometimes referred to Arya Samaj, a nineteenth-century Hindu reform movement, which stills seems to have a large following in Uttar Pradesh. For example, BKU propagandizes against excessive dowry gifts in connection with marriages, which is inspired by Arya Samaj ideology. Arya Samaj advocates against caste discrimination and for a common Hindu identity. However, it has also been seen as a predecessor of contemporary Hindu nationalism.[45]

The BKU in UP has strongly opposed the recommendations of the Mandal commission, which has not recognized the dominant Jat caste as "Backward." Gujars, Ahirs, and other "Backward" caste supporters of BKU seem to have no influence on this matter. On this issue the BKU comes very close to the position of the Hindu nationalists. In Maharashtra, the Shetkari Sanghatana has preferred to remain neutral on an issue that they see as not directly related to their struggle.

The growth of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s has been particularly strong in Uttar Pradesh, the state where the Hindu agitation for the destruction of the Babri Masjid (in Ayodhya) has been the strongest. In the state elections in May-June 1991, the Bharatiya Janata Party was voted into political power, a position that lasted up to 6 December 1992, when the Babri Masjid was destroyed by Hindu activists, without the state or central security forces being able to do anything to prevent it.[46]

BKU leaders and members stress the non-communal character of the farmers' union. It is reported that Tikait often begins a public meeting by greeting the participants with Hindu and Muslim slogans. In 1991 when asked about their relationship with the BJP and their stand on the temple struggle, Tikait answered:

> We don't participate in those kinds of struggles. It is not an important issue for us. So we are strong, and our community is strong, that is all.

In 1991, a number of interviews with Muslim farmers who were also members of the BKU confirmed that the BKU was a multi-communal organization. They did not think that the temple struggle would split the movement. "It will not affect the village situation" some claimed. They maintained that BKU had worked for communal harmony. This was exemplified by the way Muslims and Hindus participated in the occupation of Meerut in 1988, the biggest demonstration held so far by BKU. Only a short time before Meerut had been rocked by violent clashes between the two communities.

There were, however, consistent rumours that BKU indirectly supported BJP in the elections of 1991. This was regarded as a tactic to get concessions out of an emerging political force. In my recent fieldwork, however there was no confirmation by any leader or follower of the movement. Tikait himself answered diplomatically:

> Election is one thing and BKU is another. We don't ask people to vote either this side or that side. People vote according to their conscience, so they can vote any way they want. However, political leaders like Abdul Akadi, who is a Muslim leader, made some wrong deals, as a result of which the votes got divided on communal lines. So the Muslims voted for Janata Dal, while others voted for BJP. That is a political issue with which we have nothing to do, so it does not affect BKU.[47]

The BKU involvement on the BJP side in the 1991 election was reported by journalists from Meerut. According to them, Tikait, by nominating four BJP assembly candidates in "his" districts, had alienated the Muslims. That was why the latter had voted for the Congress or the Janata Dal.[48]

In a very perceptive analysis, Zoya Hasan suggests that there is a great deal of ambivalence on the part of the BKU toward the Hindu nationalist movement in western UP. BKU has somehow accommodated itself to the presence of a strong communal movement, allowing it to occupy the local public arena in towns and villages, and has not in any way presented an alternative cultural or political vision to that propounded by the Hindu nationalists.[49]

So, if the Hindu nationalist wave is sustained, BKU may not only be overrun by communal forces, it may even split and lose some of its present strength, as the communal divide cannot be resisted along the urban-rural division. When I visited the districts in 1991 it was quite clear that discussions were going on about the communal issue, and that many tried to re-establish a neutral stance. A later visit 1992 confirmed that Hindu nationalism was very strong among those farming communities who also provided support for the BKU.

Punjab

Sikh and Hindu nationalisms differ in significant ways although there have been several instances when the two movements have had tactical cooperation.[50] In fact, Sikh mobilization, at least before 1984, had very little in common with Hindu nationalism. It could be seen as a moderate sub-nationalist reformist movement, stressing both Sikh regional autonomy and social reforms. Nevertheless in the Akali Dal, the Sikh political party, the Congress party perceived a threat to its political prospects in the state. This led to the disastrous move by Indira Gandhi to split the Sikh movement by giving support to a Sikh extremist group.[51]

Being one of the oldest, biggest, and most well-organized farmers' movements in India, Punjab BKU dates back to the early 1970s. It can be seen as a very direct collective response to the changes in the agricultural economy brought about by the Green Revolution.[52] It is also a rather traditional type of farmers' movement. In fact, it is the UP movement that has drawn inspiration from the Punjab BKU and also over the years cooperated with this organization in various ways.

Before the outbreak of political violence on a broad scale in 1984, the Punjab BKU operated solely on the basis of secular non-party political lines, agitating on economic and social issues relevant to the rural population and especially the farmers. It also had intensive contacts with farmers' movements in other states.[53] However, since most farmers are Sikhs, they have been deeply influenced by Sikh political mobilizations even prior to 1984. The agricultural demands put forward by Akali Dal often converged with the demands of the BKU to such an extent that, according to some observers, in the mid-1980s the two movements "have very few conflicting grounds." It is even claimed that BKU sent volunteers to participate in various agitations staged by Akali Dal.[54] In recent years BKU has also supported Akali Dal in most general and state elections, with the exception of the 1980 State Assembly elections.[55] This has been interpreted as a reason for the success of the BKU in the State.

Sikh agitation took a dramatic turn by the events in 1984 (after the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar in June 1984, and the assassination of Indira Gandhi in November the same year) resulting in increasing state repression and escalating Sikh terrorism. Some observers claim that this development was at least partly triggered by the need to curb the successful BKU agitations during the first half of 1984. After a successful agitation in January 1984 (on the non-payment of electricity bills due to high tariffs), BKU had staged a massive blockade (*gherao*) of the Governor's residence in Chandigarh from 12–18 March, with participation of farmers even from other states in India. Demands for lower electricity tariffs and higher procurement prices were made. After negotiations, the government conceded to the appointment of a committee to look into the grievances of the farmers. After the lifting of the siege of Raj Bhavan, BKU continued with its agitations, encouraging farmers not to repay any loans, unless presented with proper accounting by the recovery staff.[56] The major mobilization of farmers was initiated in May the same year, when they were asked to prevent wheat from being moved out of Punjab until BKU's price

demands were met. The wheat blockade was set for the 10th of June. In the meantime Akali Dal leaders, threatened by the growing strength of the Bhindranwale extremist group, took opportunistic advantage of the BKU mobilization and called upon the farmers to begin picketing wheat storehouses a week in advance from the 3rd of June. Sensing danger inherent in such a situation, on May 31st the BKU leadership withdrew its wheat blockade. But it was too late. The Central government took swift preemptive action. On June 1st the Indian army and air force moved in and started its total repression of the state including the storming of the Golden Temple (Operation Blue Star). Some observers claim that a demonstration of strength of the farmers was turned into a communal issue by the Indian government under the pretext that the Akali Dal sought to destabilize law and order. Krishna Gandhi, for example, holds: "In retrospect, it was the economic threat of the peasant movement rather than the sporadic terrorism of the extremists that prompted the centre's action."[57] This led to the subsequent split in the Akali Dal giving rise to any number of underground terrorist groups, which could disrupt the rule of the state for years to come.[58]

The split in the Punjab BKU followed after 1984, partly as a result of a power struggle at the level of the union leadership and partly due to ideological differences on how to conduct the farmers' agitations in consonance with the Sikh cause. The faction, under the leadership of Bhupinder Singh Mann, president of the Punjab BKU, and Balbir Singh Rajewal, secretary of the All India BKU, has tried to keep out of communal politics and maintain a neutral stand, while the other faction, under the leadership of Ajmer Singh Lakhowal, once secretary of the Punjab BKU, has given a more active support to the Sikh cause. This is also reflected in the way these factions relate to farmers' movements in other states. The Mann-Rajewal faction has been in active cooperation with other state units in the All India Co-ordinating Committee, linked with Shetkari Sanghatana in Maharashtra, which has been combating cultural nationalism. The Lakhowal faction, on the other hand, has allied itself with the BKU in Uttar Pradesh lead by Mahendra Singh Tikait, which, as we have seen, extended a kind of indirect or tacit support to the Hindutva mobilization. Interestingly, at the height of the Punjab conflict, Tikait claimed to have pledged that he was prepared to send volunteers to Punjab to help their Jat brethren there to fight for the Sikh cause.[59]

The gap between the factions has at times appeared very wide. For example, on 10 September 1991, Ajmer Singh Lakhowal at a mass meeting in Chandigarh declared his full support to the militants fighting for an independent Sikh state of Khalistan. A few months later he withdrew this support. His initial support was interpreted as given under threat of death by the extremists.

The situation in Punjab has been changing since the election in 1992. The militant groups are losing their support, and the state administration is increasingly establishing civic control. This has enabled the BKU to return to the public stage, although in a more modest way. Their identification with the Sikh cause is no longer reflected in their agitations.

Thus, in the case of Punjab, we find yet another relationship between the farmers' movement and cultural nationalists. Since Punjab farmers are, by and large, Sikhs, it is but natural that they tend to identify with Sikh aspirations. At the same time, what is no less important, Sikh farmers generally seem to be strongly in favor of Indian unity. More than any other farmers' organizations, the BKU cooperates actively with farmers' organizations in other states. They are more inclined toward the reformist variety of Sikh nationalism, with demands for more regional autonomy, shunning away from secession advocated by other groups. The Punjab BKU, the attempt at Sikh-Hindu polarization notwithstanding, seems to be firmly entrenched in the secularist image as an economic interest group in the market for agricultural producers all over India.

Confrontation or accommodation?

Evidently, the regional farmers' movements display considerable variations in their response to the extreme nationalist movements with which we are concerned here. This is so despite the fact that all the farmers' movements are non-political mobilizations that have come about as a "product" of the structural transformation of the agrarian sector after independence.

How can these diverse responses and relationships be explained? As we have seen, an explanation may be sought in the regional characteristics of the farmers' movements. For example, the situation in Maharashtra seems to be that of a caste-class mix, especially of the leader-

ship, whereas caste and community appear to be the uniform basis both in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, along with traditions of social and cultural reforms in these regions. But it is by viewing social movements as a process in which variable opportunity structures, interactions, and identity formations merge that a wider understanding can be reached.

Looking first at the political, and what could perhaps be called ecological, opportunity structures, we find an important difference. In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab (and Haryana) there are favorable ecological conditions for the application of the green revolution strategy and stable agricultural growth. The Indian State is very dependent on the food and cash crops produced in these states for feeding the rest of the country.[60] It would seem that the farmers' unions there would be in a strong bargaining position. They have economic resources to fall back on and their production is crucial to the country as a whole: They can simply ask for the best deal in pushing the green revolution ahead. The growth of the farmers' movement can also be linked to the unstable political situation in both these states: In Punjab the Congress Party has been trying to get back the initiative from the Sikh nationalists, and in Uttar Pradesh the Congress Party has had fierce competition from several oppositional parties and fronts, notably the Lok Dal, the Janata Dal, and the Bharatiya Janata Party. In both states, moreover, the farmers' unions have at times been closely associated with these oppositional forces.

In Maharashtra the situation is very different. In vast areas of the state there is unstable agricultural growth due to poor soils and lack of water, and there the green revolution is not much of a success. It is in those areas that the Shetkari Sanghatana has grown strong. This is also reflected in the thinking of the Shetkari Sanghatana – alternative agricultural development such as small-scale and water-saving irrigation schemes, new water-sharing systems, new biotechnology, as well as rural industrialization form part of their discussions and demands. This is also part of the basis of a new cultural identity of much more modernistic shape than that in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, which makes for a completely different relationship to the communal and other social movements of the state. As shown above, Shetkari Sanghatana has actively tried to combat the Hindu nationalists in the form of its local variant of Shiv Sena. At the same time, it has fought against the Congress government in a state long considered one of the bastions of Congress rule in India. Shetkari Sanghatana under Sharad Joshi's leadership has tried to ally itself to oppositional forces, but they have been

too weak in the state to make any dent in this Congress stronghold. In 1994 Sharad Joshi suggested that the farmers' movement should form a new political party to challenge the existing and dominating parties of the state. As is now obvious, this could not prevent the Shiv Sena–BJP coalition from winning the state elections in March 1995.

The strength of the nationalist movements per se and its popular base in the various states has a strong bearing on the responses of the farmers' movements. In Punjab there is a very clear overlap between the farmers and Sikh community. It is little wonder that they get influenced by nationalist politics. In Uttar Pradesh, the growing strength of Hindu nationalism was reflected in the state assembly elections of 1991, in which the BJP won a majority of the seats and formed the state government. It is clear that Tikait and BKU tried to derive advantage out of this emerging political configuration. The farmers' movements are pragmatic when it comes to state politics. Sharad Joshi expresses this pragmatism while commenting on his support for the National Front opposition parties in the 1989 general elections:

> We have only an arithmetic interest in balancing political powers at the state level. With two-thirds of the seats in the Parliament the Congress Party is far too dominant. We are just supporting the smaller one of two thieves. V. P. Singh, the leader of the opposition, is not interested in the farmers. Our aim is a weak government, because it is easier to influence a weak government.[61]

Could it be that even Sharad Joshi and his "modern" farmers' movement in Maharashtra will yield to Hindu nationalists, now that the latter has to come to power in that state?

Social movement actions, like individual actions, are not determined only by the social characteristics attached to them. They are also processes of change, of individuals interacting and actively shaping the development of their movements given their particular goals and social constraints. If, for example, we focus on the process of social interaction and identity formation in the various movements and the ways their respective leadership have formulated the image of the movement, we find important differences.

Mahendra Singh Tikait represents a very traditional type of leadership, arising out of the customary clan system in Uttar Pradesh. He operates with the symbols of a very traditional society, informed by an old cultural reform movement, Arya Samaj, still actively shaping the interaction of the leading members of the BKU, which can be seen as a prede-

cessor of contemporary Hindu nationalism. It is not surprising that he and his farmers' movement have little to offer in terms of resistance to a broad Hindu revivalism surging through the rural areas. They are more or less overtaken by this cultural initiative.

In Punjab, despite a similar organizational structure, BKU and its leadership give a much more modern impression. BKU conducts its business in a secular style, and sets modern goals for the movement, such as the organization of producers' and consumers' co-operatives. It does not have the parochial touch of UP farmers, but is distinctly oriented toward concerted actions in an all-India farmers' front. This probably is the reason why it has largely managed to maintain a secular profile and identification with reformist Sikh forces, despite the strong communal polarization in the state.

In Maharashtra, by contrast, the farmers' movement has chosen an aggressive reformist approach that seeks to counter conservative cultural nationalism. How else could one explain its strong encouragement of a radical women's movement and the recent emphasis on ecological farming, going against the conventional wisdom of farmers and technocrats?[62] Sharad Joshi, a modern charismatic leader, uses the idioms of cultural tradition: His emphasis on an indigenous social reform tradition from Jotiba Phule to Ambedkar, and on a reformulation of the religious universe, is part of a challenge to the traditional cultural pattern. All this has made the Shetkari Sanghatana an active counter force gainst the reactionary Hindu nationalism of Shiv Sena, BJP, RSS and other similar organizations.

Conclusion

Recent developments in social movement theory help us take a comprehensive view merging economic, cultural, and political processes with the social interaction inside various farmers' movements in India. Secular interest organizations of the type that the farmers' movements represent are not in themselves a guarantee for democratic development in a multi-cultural society like India. On the contrary, they run the risk of identifying with extreme forms of cultural nationalisms that oppose this development. The reasons suggested here are both to be found in the variable social and cultural characteristics and in political opportunity structures in various regions, and in the way these movements construct their overall identity and relationships to the rest of the

society. Although the opportunity varies, it is quite clear that if the farmers' movements are to fight against reactionary cultural nationalism, they must actively articulate a reformist cultural renovation capable of meeting the nationalists on their own battlefield.

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Notes

1. See Yogendra K. Malik, "Democracy, the Akali Party and the Sikhs in Indian politics," in Dhirendra Vajpeyi and Yogendra K. Malik, editors, *Religious and Ethnic Minority Politics in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 19–49.
2. Hindu nationalist should be understood in a broad sense, branching out from two important parent organizations: the Hindu Mahasabha (founded in 1909), and the Rashtriya Swayamasevak Sangh (RSS, founded in 1925). The family of organizations under RSS are called Sangh Parivar and include, for example, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (an ecumenical religious organization started in 1964), women's, students' and workers' movements, missions to convert tribal populations, and a vast network of educational institutions, magazines and newspapers run by various organizations closely affiliated to RSS. Hansen, in a very interesting analysis, shows how these movements have been active throughout the century and slowly built up a popular Hindu nationalist consciousness and organizational strength culminating in the politicization of the 1980s. By using both cultural and political organizations they have achieved a very broad coverage, especially in northern and western India.

See Thomas Blom Hansen, "Controlling modernity: Strategies and organization of the RSS-family 1925–80s" (Paper for presentation at the symposium on State Formation and Institution Building in South Asia, Nordic Association for South Asian Studies, Sunnersta Herrgård, Sweden, 7–10 October 1993).

3. It is wrong to see Hindus and Muslims as two well-defined and antagonistic communities throughout the history of modern India. This perspective is presented by Paul Brass, "Secularism, Hindu nationalism, and the Indian state: Communal and caste conflict in contemporary India" (Paper for presentation at the symposium on State Formation and Institution Building in South Asia, Nordic Association for South Asian Studies, Sunnersta Herrgård, Sweden, 7–10 October 1993). Brass claims that "two of the most important facts concerning the Hindus and Muslims of South Asia are their heterogeneity and fragmentation, on the one hand, and the persistence of the intermingling of religious practices and observances among Hindus and Muslims at the local level." Ibid., 23.
4. Ibid., 48.
5. BJP is the successor of the earlier Hindu political party Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which was started in 1951. Jana Sangh merged with the Janata Party in 1977 in order to defeat the Congress party after the Emergency. BJP was formed in 1981. See Tapan Basu et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993).
6. Useful overviews and analyses of the cultural nationalist political forces are provided by Vajpeyi and Malik, *Religious and Ethnic Minority Politics*; Zoya Hasan, S. N. Jha and Rasheeduddin Khan, editors, *The State, Political Processes and Identity, Reflections on Modern India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989); and James Warner Björkman, editor, *Fundamentalism, Revivalists, and Violence in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989).
7. For comprehensive overviews, see M. V. Nadkarni, *Farmers' Movements in India* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1987), and the Special Issue on "New farmers' movements in India," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, ed. Tom Brass, 21/3–4 (1994).
8. Interview, March 1989.
9. Dipankar Gupta, "Peasant unionism in Uttar Pradesh – against the rural mentality thesis," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 22/2 (1992): 155–168.
10. Gail Omvedt claims that together with the various environmentalist, women's, and low caste (Dalit) movements, the farmers' movements represent a new stage in the struggle for democracy in India, which is the reason why they can all be classified as "new social movements," see Gail Omvedt, *India's Movements for Democracy: Peasants, "Greens", Women and People's Power* (Unpublished manuscript, 1989), 17. This classification can be questioned. While it is true that they all emerge in the 1970s and 1980s as significant social mobilizations, and thus must be seen in the light of the structural transformation that Indian society has undergone after Independence, they also differ in important respects from each other, because they are responses to quite different types of structural cleavages in Indian society.
11. Utsa Patnaik, "Some aspects of development in the agrarian sector in independent India," *Social Scientist* 177 (1988): 37.
12. This perspective is often found among scholars working with "Resource Mobilization Theory" or "Political process perspective." See Mario Diani, "The concept of social movement," *The Sociological Review* 40/1 (1992): 3–7.
13. See Sidney Tarrow, "National politics and collective action: Recent theory and research in Western Europe and the United States," *Annual Review of Sociology*,

14 (1988): 429–430; and his recently published book, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Social movements," in Neil J. Smelser, editor, *Handbook of Sociology* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988): 699–700.

14. This emphasis on identity formation in the study of social movements has been called the "identity-oriented paradigm." See Jean L. Cohen, "Strategy or identity: New theoretical paradigms and contemporary social movements," *Social Research* 52/4 (1985): 663–716. For famous examples of this approach see, for example, Francesco Alberoni, *Movement and Institution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Alberto Melucci, "The symbolic challenge of contemporary movements," *Social Research* 52/4 (1985): 789–816; and Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, edited by John Keane and Paul Mier (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).
15. Developed in Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
16. Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, and his "Frontier land: Collective action between actors and systems," in Mario Diani and Ron Eyerman, editors, *Studying Collective Action* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 238–258.
17. Diani, "The concept of social movements." See also Tarrow, "National politics and collective action," and *Power in Movement.*
18. Thomas Blom Hansen, *Politics and Ideology in Developing Societies: An Explorative Essay* (Aalborg, Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies, Aalborg University, 1991).
19. Joseph Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).
20. For a discussion of the way the British colonialists classified Indian people, see Romila Thapar, "Communalism and the historical legacy: Some facts," in K. N. Panikkar, editor, *Communalism in India: History, Politics and Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991), 17–33. See also C. P. Bhambri, "State and communalism in India," ibid., 127–128.
21. Jonathan Friedman, "Culture, identity and world process," *Review* 12/1 (1989).
22. Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 84–88.
23. See Zoya Hasan, "Changing orientation of the state and the emergence of majoritarianism in the 1980s," in Panikkar, *Communalism in India*, 144–145.
24. See Brass, *Secularism, Hindu Nationalism and the Indian State*, 25–47; and Sukumar Muralidharan, "Mandal, mandir aur masjid: 'Hindu' communalism and the crisis of the state," in Panikkar, *Communalism in India*, 196–218.
25. For a more detailed discussion of these processes, see Staffan Lindberg, "New farmers' movements in India as structural response and collective identity formation: The cases of Shetkari Sanghatana and the BKU," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 21/3–4 (1994); and Venkatesh Athreya, Göran Djurfeldt and Staffan Lindberg, *Barriers Broken: Production Relations and Agrarian Change in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990), ch. 4.
26. In this connection it should be noted that the Hindu nationalist trade union, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, seems to have had considerable success among workers in the new small-scale industries growing up in smaller urban centers and rural

areas as a result of the Green Revolution. During the 1980s it has become the second most important trade union in India. See Hansen, *Controlling Modernity*, 14–16.

27. Athreya et al., *Barriers Broken*, ch. 5.
28. Malcolm Chapman, Maryon McDonald and Elizabeth Tonkin, "Introduction – History and social anthropology," in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman, editors, *History and Ethnicity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 17.
29. Cf. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
30. Cf. Hansen, *Politics and Ideology*; and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).
31. Hansen, *Controlling Modernity*, 1. See also Björn Olav Utvik, "Islam: Digesting modernity the Islamic way," *Forum for Development Studies* 2 (1993).
32. The predominance of the cultural dimension in politics is also evident in the massive proliferation of various regional and tribal movements all over India today. Irrespective of their demands for material benefits, or for an independent or autonomous region, their appearance is almost invariably cultural. They stress traditional cultural values or a renaissance of these, or they convert to new religions or sects, like tribals becoming Hindus, Christians, Muslims or Buddhists. The cultural and communal element is further obvious in the various low or exuntouchable caste movements, the so-called *Dalit* movements, that challenge the supremacy of the higher and predominantly Hindu castes. Though marked by their demands for social and economic emancipation through access to public resources, education and employment, their language is also quite clearly that of cultural reform, in which traditional Hindu cultural values and traditions are challenged. Cf. Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution. New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India* (Armonk N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 47 ff.
33. Peter Gundelach, *Sociale bevaegelser og samfundsaendringer* (Social Movements and Social Change). *Nye sociale grupperinger og deres organisationsformer ved overgangen til aendrede samfundstyper* (Aarhus: Politica, 1988), ch. 5.
34. See Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and civil society: Democracy, diversity and self-determination," *International Sociology* 8/4 (1993): 404.
35. The following case studies are based on a combination of shorter field work, mainly consisting of interviews with leaders and followers, with the use of secondary literature. In the case of Punjab my visit was very brief and confined to Chandigarh only, where I met with some prominent leaders. Other Punjab leaders were interviewed in New Delhi.
36. Useful studies of the Shetkari Sanghatana include D. N. Dhanagare, "Shetkari Sanghatana: The farmers' movement in Maharashtra – background and ideology," *Social Action* 40/4 (1990); Gail Omvedt, "The 'new peasant movement' in India," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 20/2 (1988); Gail Omvedt, "The farmers' movement in Maharashtra," in Ilina Sen, editor, *A Space Within the Struggle: Women's Participation in People's Movements* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990), 229–279; Cornelia Lenneberg, "Sharad Joshi and the farmers: The middle peasant lives!" *Pacific Affairs* 61/3 (1988): 446–464; and Girish Sahasrabudhey, "The new farmers' movement in Maharashtra," in Sunil Sahasrabudhey, editor, *The Peasant Movement Today* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1986), 3–29.
37. See Dhanagare, "Shetkari Sanghatana."
38. Gail Omvedt, "Jotiba Phule and the analysis of peasant exploitation" (Paper

presented at Seminar on Mahatma Jyotirao Phule – An Incomplete Renaissance, Centre for Social Studies, Surat, 9–11 January 1991).

39. Gail Omvedt, "Shetkari Sanghatana's new direction," *Economic and Political Weekly* (5 Oct. 1991); and Gail Omvedt, "Interview with Sharad Joshi," (Unpublished ms., 1992).
40. Personal interview, March 1989.
41. Personal interview, March 1989. Sharad Joshi's view of the rise of Shiv Sena in the state of Maharashtra may be only partially correct. In fact, it seems that there was considerable sympathy for Shiv Sena's regionalist ideology among Congress politicians, especially the younger generation, and many of these joined Shiv Sena in the late 1980s. The Congress party has also received support from Shiv Sena at various occasions. Recently, however, the Congress party has been able to win back many of these younger activists by opening up political posts for them. Personal information from Thomas Blom Hansen, Roskilde University Centre.
42. The formidable strength of the Hindu nationalists in the period 1987 to 1992 is described in a recent paper by Thomas Blom Hansen, "The Maratha'ization of Hindutva: BJP and Shiv Sena in rural Maharashtra" (Paper for 13th European SAS-Conference, Toulouse, 31 Aug.–3 Sept. 1994).
43. Useful studies of Uttar Pradesh BKU include Dipankar Gupta, "Country-town nexus and agrarian mobilization: Bharatiya Kisan Union as an instance," *Economic and Political Weekly* 23/51 (1988): 2688–96; and Dipankar Gupta, "The country-town nexus and agrarian mobilisation: situating the Farmers' Movement in West U.P.," in K. L. Sharma and Dipankar Gupta, editors, *Country-Town Nexus: Studies in Social Transformation in Contemporary India* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1991), 74–103; Zoya Hasan, "Self-serving guardians: Formation and strategy of the Bharatiya Kisan Union," *Economic and Political Weekly* 24/48 (1989): 2663–70; Zoya Hasan and Utsa Patnaik, *Aspects of the Farmers' Movement in Uttar Pradesh in the Context of Uneven Growth of Capitalist Agriculture* (New Delhi, Centre for Political Studies and Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, mimeo, 1992); D. N. Dhanagare, "An apoliticist populism: A case study of B.K.U.," in K. L. Sharma and Dipankar Gupta, editors, *Country-Town Nexus*, 104–22; and Jagpal Singh, *Capitalism and Dependence: Agrarian Politics in Western Uttar Pradesh 1951–1991* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992).
44. Discussed by Stig Toft Madsen, "Clan, kinship, and Panchayat justice among the Jats of Western Uttar Pradesh," *Anthropos* 86 (1991): 351–65; and in Hasan and Patnaik, *Aspects of the Farmers Movement.*
45. D. S. Sarma, "The nature and history of Hinduism," in Kenneth W. Morgan, editor, *The Religion of the Hindus* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1953), 44.
46. This inactivity of the state government led to its immediate dismissal by the central government on that date. The BJP state government was replaced by President's rule.
47. Personal interview, August 1991.
48. Another indication of the BKU support for BJP is that after the elections the police did not arrest Tikait despite serious criminal charges against him.
49. Zoya Hasan, "Shifting ground: Hindutva politics and the Farmers' Movement in Uttar Pradesh," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 21/3–4 (1994): 165–194.
50. Useful studies of the Punjab BKU include Kehar Singh, *Farmers' Movement and Pressure Group Politics* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1990); K. R. Krishna Gandhi, "The new peasant movement in Punjab," in Sunil Sahasrabudhey, editor, *Peasant Movement in Modern India* (Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1989),

55–75; Sucha Singh Gill, "The farmers' movement and agrarian change in the green revolution belt of North-West India," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 21/3–4 (1994): 195–211; and Sucha Sing Gill and K. C. Singhal, "Punjab: farmers' agitation. Response to development crisis of agriculture," *Economic and Political Weekly* (October 1984): 1728–32.

51. Thus, the kind of accommodation that has taken place in Tamil Nadu between the Congress party and one of the Tamilian political parties has not been tried in Punjab.
52. The group started in 1972, originally named the Punjab Khetibari Zimindara Union (KZU), when agitations started for a higher procurement price of wheat and against increases in the electricity tariffs. Thus, the union in its present shape is almost as old as the Tamilaga Vyvasayigal Sangham in Tamil Nadu. In 1980, the movement changed its name to Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU).
53. Before the growth of BKU, Punjab farmers and peasants were most successfully mobilized by a communist led Kisan Sabha, which commanded a large following. The Kisan Sabha, however, has over the years taken an increasingly anti-Sikh stand, which seems to have severed them from the Sikh farmers. Another reason for the decline of the Kisan Sabha in Punjab, as elsewhere, is the fact that its overall aim was to build a farmers' and workers' alliance, organizing also agricultural workers in the peasant unions. Such an alliance has been progressively more difficult to achieve after the land reforms and the Green Revolution, with the growth of a commercialized peasantry pitted against the state on prices and other economic issues. The result is that what was originally a peasant-worker front is now increasingly only an agricultural labor union (see Gill and Singhal, "Punjab: Farmers' Agitation," 1732). Moreover, this union seems to be rather weak.
54. Ibid., 1732.
55. Sucha Sing Gill, "Agrarian change and farmers' movement in Green revolution belt of North-West India" (Paper to the workshop on "The New Farmers' Movements in India in 1980s and 1990s" in New Delhi, 12–14 March 1993, organized by ICSSR and the *Journal of Peasant Studies*): 15–16; and Singh, *Farmers' Movement and Pressure Group Politics*, 15, 68.
56. Gill and Singhal, "Punjab: Farmers' agitation," 1730.
57. Gandhi, "The new peasant movement in Punjab," 67.
58. Interview with Bhupinder Singh Mann, August 1991.
59. Personal interview, October 1992.
60. Cf. Utsa Patnaik, "Food economy in the peril," *Frontline* (31 Aug.–13 Sept. 1991).
61. Personal interview, February 1989.
62. Gail Omvedt, "Peasants, Dalits and women: Democracy and India's new social movements" (Draft of paper for the Workshop on "Social Movements, State and Democracy" organized by the Delhi University Group in Politics and the Indian Statistical Institute Sociology Group, New Delhi, 5–8 October 1992).