



‘The Making of the Working Class’: E. P. Thompson and Indian History¹ *by Rajnarayan Chandavarkar*

The reception and influence of Edward Thompson’s historical work has been marked by paradox. It is surprising, for instance, that a historian in whose work the state occupied such an important place should have spawned a vast historiography in which the state was simply left out. Moreover, Thompson’s writings were characterized by their Englishness; yet, for one who was quite so attentive to the specificities of a peculiar social and cultural context, it is remarkable that the influence of his work was global, attracting followers in several continents and diverse historiographies. Finally, it is ironical that while Thompson was perhaps best known, and most widely admired, for having demonstrated how the history of a class may be written, his method and style of argument may have contributed substantially to the deconstruction and dissolution of the very concept of class.

In the light of these paradoxes, this essay examines the influence of Thompson’s work on the investigation of the working class in Indian history. Its purpose is to consider primarily how historians of India responded to Thompson’s inspirational work, how they read it and what they took away

from it; and further, how the expectations of social theory were served when confronted with the evidence of Indian working-class history.

The tradition of writing about Indian labour has passed through several shifts in perspective and approach but each has indelibly marked the subject. Until 1918, commentaries about labour in India, produced largely by social investigators, both official and philanthropic, focussed upon the physical and moral degradation of the urban poor, and considered the means by which their conditions might be alleviated. The flurry of strikes which followed the first world war stimulated a wave of writing about labour which, in the context of widespread public anxieties about urban poverty and overcrowding, the rise of nationalism and the threat of widespread unrest, disclosed a greater sensitivity to, and apprehension of, the possible political consequences of impoverishment and exploitation.² As publicists and philanthropists were drawn into representing workers during industrial disputes, they turned their attention to the growth of strikes and trade unions. They meditated upon the nature and weaknesses of trade unions, the role and effect upon them of 'outsiders' (that is, organizers who were not themselves workers) and the proper place of political programmes and ideology in their activities.³

From the late 1920s, the growing influence of communists in the trade union movement pulled this literature in fresh directions. The communists assumed the inherent revolutionary propensity of the working-classes and understood their own role to be the realization of this potential. They also took it for granted that the working classes were primarily concerned with real and immediate material issues. By contrast, nationalism appeared to be an effete bourgeois ideology which was unlikely to sustain, even if it was able to muster, mass support. To the extent that the Congress gained a mass following, the communists set themselves the task of entering the anti-imperialist struggle and directing the working classes towards their revolutionary goals.⁴ Accordingly, they examined specific working-class struggles to measure the level of revolutionary consciousness and scrutinized bourgeois consciousness for signs of progress. They considered how deeply the Indian bourgeoisie was committed to nationalism and whether its political leadership would develop the anti-imperialist struggle in a radical direction or whether it was more likely to abandon and betray its popular following.⁵ These debates among Indian communists, which in part originated in the theoretical preoccupations of the Comintern, exercised a powerful influence upon the subsequent development of Indian nationalist and Marxist historiography.

These lines of enquiry intersected in the 1950s and 1960s with a growing interest in blueprints for 'development' and modernization. Historians now sought to investigate how far the labour force could be, or had been, rendered functional to the needs of industrialization. They focussed upon the supply of labour, measured its rates of turnover and assessed its commitment to the factory. Most crucially, historians working from widely diver-

gent assumptions converged upon the mobilization, recruitment and organization of labour in the modern industrial setting.⁶ Alternatively, sometimes in addition, they analysed the development of trade unions as the outcome of the conflict between modern institutional forms of organization and the social control of supposedly 'traditional' leaders drawn from the ranks of jobbers, recruiting agents and labour contractors.⁷ In this way, the history of the working class was studied in terms of the intentions and objectives of the entrepreneurs or made interchangeable with the history of their leaders, trade unions and political parties. Moreover, the history of the Indian working classes came to be represented as an example of a labour force at 'an early stage of industrialization', which, it was implied, was evolving towards the 'advanced stage' manifested in 'the West'.

In the late 1970s, when Thompson was elected President of the Indian History Congress, and rode into session on the back of an elephant, this was a tribute primarily to *The Making*. Yet, at the time, studies of the Indian working class strongly reflected their long-standing historiographical inheritance. Historians investigated 'the material conditions' of the working classes and explored the relationship between labour and wider political movements. For some, reflecting the elite bias of the historiography or working from evolutionary assumptions about industrialization, the notion of 'the making of an Indian working class' was an invitation to satire. Most historians, and especially Marxists, took it for granted that the working class was essentially a structural formation. The weakness of capitalist development in India and its associated characteristics – the persistence of traditional loyalties of caste, kinship and religion – made the notion of a working class, let alone the prospect of class consciousness, unthinkable.

It would seem that these assumptions about the evolutionary and structural character of class took hold despite *The Making*; but it is also possible to see that they could be affirmed by a particular reading of the ambiguities and contradictions of its arguments about class formation. The conceptual originality of *The Making* was, of course, to have represented class as a historical, rather than a structural, fact, and the outcome of agency and struggle, experience and consciousness. Nonetheless, Thompson refused to surrender the theory – however lightly held – that class and class consciousness was 'largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily.'⁸ This determinism strengthened the notion that class and class consciousness were intimately related to the particular character of production relations and implied that 'the working class' only fully existed, and therefore, could only properly be studied in advanced capitalist societies. It is significant, therefore – and a reflection of this orthodoxy – that the major debate in Indian Marxism in the 1970s, conducted primarily by economists, focussed upon 'the mode of production' and appeared to miss the issues being raised by social history altogether.⁹ More generally, Indian historiography was then characterized by an excessive concern either with the history of elites or with those features of Indian society which seem-

ingly made it unique and exceptional – with British policy or how Indian elites subverted their intentions, with the counterfactual question of whether Britain developed or retarded the Indian economy and with social and cultural responses to ‘westernization’ and ‘modernization’. The study of the working class fitted uneasily with these dominant tendencies in the wider historiography.

The significance of working-class struggles was not diminished, however, simply because they were shrouded in obscurity by the academy. The Indian working class had scarcely been a negligible force. Between 1918 and 1940, for instance, there had been eight general strikes in Bombay city alone, each lasting long periods, while in 1928–29, the city was brought to a standstill for nearly eighteen months.¹⁰ From 1928, the labour movement passed under the hegemony of a communist leadership, which retained its dominance until the 1960s.¹¹ These developments in Bombay were exceptional in scale, but not in character. Similarly, long-lasting and bitterly contested strikes had repeatedly brought workers together throughout the subcontinent in the early twentieth century. Moreover, while agrarian revolt was what the British feared most, the great nationalist agitations were largely urban affairs in which poor town-dwellers played a prominent part.

It was only in the late 1970s, with the appearance of Thompson’s first eighteenth-century studies that his influence came to be more directly and tangibly registered in Indian historiography. This had already owed something to the significance of ‘moral economy’¹² for interpreting the episodic accounts of mass political action which were offered in the historians’ most common, indeed, ubiquitous, sources: police and newspaper reports. Since these accounts often described incidents in a rather decontextualized way, they were bound to prove difficult to interpret. ‘Moral economy’ offered a means of identifying a collective sense of injustice and a legitimizing rationale behind what otherwise appeared to read as rather disjointed and discontinuous tales of an episodic past. Yet, at the same time, the use of ‘moral economy’ to elaborate these accounts of popular politics did not necessarily challenge some of the basic assumptions upon which historians proceeded. It could be fitted readily into polarities of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. It did not have to disturb the prevailing sense of an undifferentiated ‘popular culture’. It provided a convenient formula and a point of reference which enabled some historians – partly because it had the weight of Thompson’s accreditation behind it – to describe collective action without looking too closely at its constituent elements.

Perhaps more far-reaching was the significance of Thompson’s elaboration of the notion of ‘class struggle without class’. The concept of ‘class’, Thompson now argued, could either describe the development of class and class consciousness ‘in the full sense’ or it could be deployed as a ‘heuristic or analytic category’ in the investigation of social conflict and social relations. In this latter sense, class was ‘inseparable from the notion of “class struggle”’.¹³ Since class consciousness was the product, not the prediction,

of historical experience, class struggle preceded its emergence and indeed, facilitated its development. The ties which bound class to a given stage of capitalism appeared to have been relaxed. In other words, an important implication of Thompson's argument seemed to be that class struggle and the cultural and historical experience which it encompassed could be studied more extensively in societies where capitalism had manifested itself weakly and unevenly.

By the late 1970s, there were already signs that historians of India were beginning to turn their attentions to the study of popular movements, their social economy and their political culture.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the most prominent site for the absorption of Thompson's insights was the work produced under the title of *Subaltern Studies*.¹⁵ This work, conducted by scholars based at first in Canberra, Sussex and Oxford, has represented the most influential intervention in Indian history in the past fifteen years. It has disclosed diverse subjects and approaches, some shared themes and, at the outset, a common purpose to investigate the history of the subaltern classes. This common purpose, rather than a set of general arguments or insights about colonial India, has imparted a measure of coherence to *Subaltern Studies*. In this sense, it should be seen as part of a general, indeed global, interest in social and cultural history which had developed since the 1960s. Its historiographical contribution lies not so much in its collective effort, in a coherent theory or interpretation of Indian history, but in some outstanding monographs produced by individual scholars who have been associated with the project. The most successful of these studies sought to situate local social conflicts and political movements, and the complex social relationships which informed them, in their material and discursive context.¹⁶ Since the achievement of *Subaltern Studies* lies in the particular significance of individual monographs, any attempt to treat the corpus as a whole must leave a trail of exceptions in its wake.¹⁷

Many of the influences which shaped the development of Indian historiography in general have necessarily left their mark on the *Subaltern* scholars. But it is perhaps crucial to note that the *Subaltern* point of departure was initially to be found in their insistence upon 'the autonomy of peasant insurgency'.¹⁸ Between the 1930s and the 1960s, it was primarily the growth of peasant radicalism, sometimes precisely in those areas which lay beyond the reaches of the party, which breathed life and energy into Indian communism. Yet, by the early 1970s, these revolutionary impulses appeared to have petered out or else they had been confined to their localities. The left, especially the revolutionary left, now had to face up to its failure to adequately engage and mobilize the peasantry. It was perhaps the recognition of, and disillusionment with, the very limitations of the political and intellectual influence of the left that nurtured the perception of 'the autonomy' of the popular domain. However, this insistence on 'the autonomy of peasant insurgency' may now be seen to have opened the way to the reification of collective identities in the work of the subaltern historians and

pushed them often towards an essentialist interpretation of popular culture and consciousness.

While, at first, the subaltern historians borrowed liberally from Thompson's ideas, rhetoric and example, they seemed to take little account of wider developments in social history and least of all, the critiques of Thompson's work which had already become fairly widespread.¹⁹ Their particular translation of Thompson's methods and objectives was distorted by the fact that their agenda owed little to the debates and insights of social history. Moreover, the Subaltern interpretation of Thompson and their deployment of his insights was limited primarily by their own problematic. The organizing principle of their research was to be found, following an old convention, in the clash between imperialism and nationalism. At first, they were concerned, primarily in reaction to the 'Namierism' of the Cambridge school,²⁰ to provide an alternative history of Indian nationalism. To this end, they substituted 'the making of the Indian nation' for 'the making of the working class' and defined nationalism as the 'consciousness' which 'informed this process'. Their aim was to establish the significance of 'the politics of the people' to 'the making of the Indian nation'. This politics was constrained, they explained, by the fact that the working class was 'still not sufficiently mature' whether in its 'social being' or its 'consciousness as a class-for-itself.' Their 'sectional struggles' were thus soon 'entangled in economism' or alternatively, 'wherever politicized, remained, for want of a revolutionary leadership, far too fragmented to form effectively into anything like a national liberation movement.'²¹ Already in 1981, the Subaltern manifesto carried a rather archaic tone. Thompson's echo now reverberated in the leaden language of the Comintern.

Thompson has been poorly represented by his disciples among the Subaltern historians. First, a rather narrow, over-literal and mechanistic interpretation of culture has often led them to deem the investigation of the economy to be 'deterministic'.²² Second, despite Thompson's own attention to the state, the Subaltern historians, concerned with 'the autonomous domain' of the people, often appeared to emancipate their own historical research from the intrusions of the colonial state. Where its presence was acknowledged, the state appeared simply as a monolithic instrument of oppression and exploitation, whose institutions were closed to political negotiation and conflict.²³ This neglect of the economy and the state precluded the sustained analysis of class formation in Indian society. Third, they often brought from Thompson, in a rather simplistic, undifferentiated, and therefore, sometimes caricatured form, an emphasis on the cultural traditions and inheritances of particular social groups. Thus, for instance, this 'inheritance' turned in Dipesh Chakrabarty's hands into a static, timeless, indeed Orientalist characterization of a 'traditional' Indian, implicitly 'Hindu' culture – in Bengal, a predominantly Muslim province. Whereas in India, Chakrabarty argues, 'hierarchy and the violence that sustains it remain the dominant organizing principles in everyday life', Britain and the

West is, by contrast, characterized by egalitarianism, individualism and democracy.²⁴ Closely allied to, perhaps integral to, this Orientalist conception of a 'hierarchical culture' is, in Chakrabarty's account, its inherently 'pre-capitalist' character. This character is identified not by an examination of the history of Bengal's production relations but by the absence of the properties of capitalism which, according to his reading of Thompson, comprised the historical experience of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England. Thus, 'pre-capitalist relationships' are identified by 'the absence of notions of "citizenship", "individualism", "equality before the law" and so on' and by the absence of "'formal equality'" and 'the "formal freedom of contract"'.²⁵ Bengali society, indeed Indian society, was now represented as England's proverbial Other.

It was also another implication of Thompson's position in the late 1970s that writing the history of the working class must entail disaggregating it into its component parts. Once the residual determinism of *The Making* was relaxed, Thompson's work could be read as an example of a self-confessedly Marxist history concerned to push the analysis of class to its conceptual limits and, indeed, beyond them. In this way, despite his insistence on 'the making of the working class', Thompson's work contributed to the development of a historiography in Britain and elsewhere which has increasingly stressed its fragmentation. It is not difficult to see how Thompson's own style stimulated this deconstruction. Thompson's emphasis on 'experience' and 'the cultural handling' of class, and indeed, his own attention to the specificities of social and cultural context, and to the finer discriminations within it, invited the better and closer appreciation of the range and varieties of class experience. His treatment of the collective experience of the working class was often distilled through individual lives, particular events and specific localities, which stressed patterns of differentiation within the working class. The more closely these differences and particularities of social experience were examined, the richer the evidence, the more complex the interpretative possibilities they suggested, so increasingly the more abstract and remote the determination (however weak) of production relations appeared, not only as a framework of explanation, but especially as the source of an immanent solidarity.

Moreover, 'the making of the English working class', it has often been observed, was dominated by the role of radical artisans. Their predominance set the English case apart from virtually every other, where – as in India – the working classes were formed primarily by rural migrants. But, in addition, the significance of the artisanal presence in 'the making of the English working class' served to highlight the contradictions of sectionalism in the process of class formation. If working-class consciousness was shaped by the institutions and ideology of artisans, it was likely to have included other lesser proletarian groups on weaker terms, or sometimes excluded them altogether. The very dominance of artisans in 'the making of the English working class' was bound to direct attention to the differences of

skill and occupation or the sectionalism fostered by region and religion, nationalism and gender. As Thompson was recently to complain, 'it is very much the fashion of our own time for intellectuals to discover that working people were (and are) bigoted, racist, sexist, but/and at heart deeply conservative and loyal to Church and King.'²⁶

As the determining force of production relations in the formation of class and class consciousness was progressively relaxed by Thompson, so the range and variety of social experience and political conflict through which they could be realized was expanded and diversified. The notion of class struggle without class widened the range of social and political action which was brought into the consideration of class formation. Class and class consciousness, Thompson argued, was the culmination of a process by which 'people . . . identify points of antagonistic interest' and 'commence to struggle around these issues'.²⁷ Necessarily, these points of antagonistic interest (and their perception as such) and forms of struggle were likely to vary not only with the tensions and conflicts of specific, local contexts, but also among the different groups which populated them; and joining them up could be seen to be a task no less complex for later historians than for the political protagonists of the time.

In India, where the working class was constituted by rural migrants, the line of historiographical reasoning moved in the opposite direction. It was precisely because of the supposedly 'traditional' or pre-capitalist character of Indian society in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that historians took it for granted that its working class could not be made.²⁸ Indeed, the very notion seemed anachronistic, as if Indian society belonged to some previous epoch, through which Britain and the West had already passed. Thus, in the colonial period, Ranajit Guha declared, in launching *Subaltern Studies*, 'The working class was still not sufficiently mature in the objective conditions of its social being and its consciousness as a class-for-itself.'²⁹ It possessed, we are told, 'an emergent, though elementary, class consciousness.'³⁰ The urban working classes consisted primarily of rural migrants, who, it was often said, brought their peasant ways into the factory. They were rooted firmly in a tradition, it was supposed, which was marked by powerful caste, kinship and religious loyalties. If their experience of modernity and industrialism might help to forge solidarities among them, their cultural inheritance was bound to divide and fragment them. Although the working classes repeatedly demonstrated their ability to forge solidarities and to effect and sustain industrial and political action over very long periods, it was tempting to conclude that this working class represented a particular kind of pre-capitalist social formation whose primordial loyalties were always likely to defeat the possibilities of class solidarity.

The Subaltern followers of Thompson did not resist this temptation. They have often espoused the conventional wisdom, recently restated by Dipesh Chakrabarty, that rural migrants 'imported a peasant culture into the industrial setting.' This conclusion was not the product of an extensive investi-

gation of the nature of labour migration, how workers perceived their rural base or indeed how they organized themselves in the towns into which they migrated. Nonetheless, this 'peasant culture' was, according to Chakrabarty, primarily 'a pre-capitalist, inegalitarian culture marked by strong primordial loyalties of community, language, religion, caste and kinship.'³¹ Rural migrants, it was supposed, possessed a tradition of violence, which they brought into the industrial setting; they were said to have an inherent predisposition to crime; and they were readily drawn to religious bigotry which they displayed with vigour in communal (Hindu-Muslim) riots.³² Thus, some Subaltern historians mistook the received wisdom and commonplace of colonial officials for interpretative novelty.

Yet few of these suppositions will withstand careful scrutiny.³³ We should be wary, especially in India, of taking a simplistic, bland view of 'rural traditions' or 'peasant culture'. Indian agrarian society was highly differentiated; and rural traditions and peasant cultures were themselves rather varied. Labour migrants were drawn largely from the small-holding peasantry, rather than necessarily, the landless rural poor; but the coal mines and tea gardens recruited not only from the impoverished peasantry but from various tribal groups as well. Some peasants went to nearby towns in search of work in the short-term; most migrated to neighbouring districts to earn wages from field labour; a few travelled substantial distances to the large cities and often, whatever their original intentions, were drawn more permanently into the urban and industrial labour force.³⁴

The patterns of labour migration were marked by strong continuities over several generations, which makes nonsense of an evolutionary understanding of class formation. Thus migrants to the large industrial centres were usually adult males, who left their families in their village, and spent their working lives in the city but maintained close connections with their rural base. Having been born in their villages, they often returned to them in periods of sickness or in old age. This pattern of migration could continue over several generations. It would be misleading to suppose, therefore, that rural migrants were on the point of transition from peasants to proletarians – for we would then have to concede that they remained thus suspended in evolutionary time for over a century.

The aim of most migrants was to earn cash – or gain wider access to credit – to enable them to hold on to or consolidate their stake in the village, by paying off debts, rent arrears or other dues. The predominance of adult males was greater in the case of long-distance migration, urban and industrial employment and indentured labour especially in its early phase. The persistence of this sexual division of labour between town and country scarcely lends plausibility to the simple transference of peasant culture into the cities. Moreover, the strategy of smallholding peasant households to retain their land by sending their male relatives away to earn cash also increased their dependence upon the more intensive exploitation of female and child labour on their village plots. In the urban and industrial context,

however, factory legislation to regulate the conditions of women's work after 1881 limited their employment opportunities largely to casual, manual, unskilled and poorly paid occupations. If women's work was confined to the domestic sphere in the peasant household and thus devalued, their alternative employment opportunities carried low status, considerable uncertainty and meagre rewards. The identification of women's work with low status had significant social consequences. Respectability became the exclusive attribute of households which were able to withdraw the labour of women. If women's work was confined to their home, their public presence degraded them. The interplay of the conditions which hedged women's participation in the labour market and their characterization in public discourse necessarily shaped their relationship not only with their employers but also with other workers.³⁵

Rural migrants, seeking to conserve their smallholding base in the countryside, entered an overstocked labour market, in which jobs and housing were scarce, wages low, and social conditions appalling. Wages were often barely sufficient for the subsistence of the worker and in most cases, insufficient to support a family. Most workers were hired daily on a casual basis and their hold on employment was always tenuous. Low wages, uncertain conditions of employment and poor housing ensured that most migrants had to leave their families in their villages. But living on the margins of subsistence in the cities also made it essential for them to turn to their rural base for support in times of sickness, unemployment and old age. At the same time, urban employment remained indispensable to secure and maintain their village base. This meant that migrant workers with the strongest rural connections were often the most active in defence of their jobs and their wage levels and among the most 'committed' to the factory and the industrial setting. During strikes, employers found it easiest to recruit blacklegs from the most proletarianized sections of the urban work force. The communist trade unions in Bombay in the 1930s found their most determined followers among migrant workers who retained close connections with their village base.

This was not, however, the consequence of inherited rural traditions of resistance and violence finding expression in the towns. Migrant workers from Satara, which had a long and continuing tradition of resistance, were among the more quiescent in Bombay; those from Ratnagiri, a district whose political temper by contrast appeared somnolent, were to be found in the vanguard of the workers' movements. Migrants from the turbulent districts of East UP and Bihar appeared to be docile in Bombay, but militant in the jute mill towns of Bengal.³⁶ In neither case, for instance, was the tradition of socialism of the peasant associations in this region in the 1930s registered in the politics of its migrant workers. If anything, the traffic flowed in the opposite direction, but even then as a relatively thin trickle, with some workers organizing their fellow villagers in nationalist agitations or around particular agrarian conflicts.³⁷ It is possible that migrant workers so firmly

committed to the industrial setting, with their families and the retention of their village ties so dependent on their industrial earnings, were reluctant to carry the risks of resistance in the countryside. In any case, rural traditions and inherited cultural practices informed political consciousness in complex ways, and their effects were not manifested directly and immediately in political action.

More significantly, perhaps, this disjunction between rural traditions and urban practice may be attributed to the social and political context into which migrants entered. The urban neighbourhoods and industrial setting had a history and a momentum of their own, capable of transforming the values and expectations of migrant workers. The social organization of the neighbourhood was closely integrated with the workplace. Workers had to use their social connections in the neighbourhood to find employment, secure housing and obtain credit. Jobbers and sirdars, who acted as agents of labour recruitment and discipline, were powerless in the workplace if they did not cultivate a following or cut a figure in the neighbourhood. Strikes which began within the mill gates were often conducted in the streets, where employers sought to hire blacklegs, workers fought to prevent them and the state intervened, often clumsily, to maintain order. Trade unions suppressed at the workplace sought to maintain a presence in the neighbourhood. The political traditions of the neighbourhood were often characterized by reciprocity as patrons – whether landlords, jobbers, graindealers or creditors – served their clients and could not simply bully, coerce and exploit them (although there was plenty of that, too). Its political traditions were informed not only by antagonisms between landlords and tenants, creditors and borrowers, graindealers and consumers, but also by a history of active struggle with employers and the state. It was in the public arenas of street and neighbourhood that the interventions of the state were most evident – in quelling a riot, arresting pickets or escorting blacklegs into factories. And it was primarily in relation to the state that the political consciousness of the working classes took shape.

The urban neighbourhoods were not, therefore, the repositories of the primordial loyalties of the working classes. They provided the materials from which wider class solidarities could be forged. Caste and kinship ties were vital to the social organization of workers; but so were the affinities of region and religion, workplace and neighbourhood, trade unions and political parties, all of which cut across each other. To insist that the culture of migrant workers was characterized by 'strong primordial ties of community, language, religion, caste and kinship' is to obscure the extent to which their interaction produced something quite different and it is to remain blind to the extent to which their 'culture' was also informed by work and by politics, and indeed, by the daily struggles of workplace and neighbourhood.

So the sectionalism of the working class was neither simply the corollary of their so-called 'primordial loyalties' nor the expression a culturally-specific 'Indian' tradition. On the other hand, more industrialization did not

generate greater homogeneity and class solidarity, as the characterization of their culture as 'pre-capitalist' might suggest. In fact, industrialization often served to exacerbate differences between workers. The impact of trade fluctuations or managerial policies were felt differentially throughout the work force. Business strategies varied not only between different centres of the same industry but between individual units in the same centre. The diversity of conditions within particular industries accentuated the differences between workers. In the cotton textile industry, for instance, the quality of machinery, the layout of the mill, the policies and attitudes of the managers and the composition of output varied from mill to mill and influenced the wages which could be earned and the working conditions which prevailed in particular mills. Such differences could induce labour mobility and wage competition and they could also stimulate wage demands and collective pressure for improved conditions. Workers within the same mill competed for the supply of the best raw materials, the assignment of the most paying orders and the use of the best machinery. As millowners attempted to regulate production to the short-term fluctuations in demand, its effects could be to increase the flow of work to some workers and make other redundant. It was rarely the case that changing entrepreneurial strategies affected the entire work force in the same way. Industrialization did not always reduce, it sometimes intensified the competition between workers. If it concentrated workers into larger masses, it did not thereby increase their homogeneity but sometimes exacerbated the diversity of their interests. Workers in industry were not involved simply in a single relationship of exploitation with capital but also in relationships of competition with each other. By contrast, the neighbourhood was not the embodiment of their sectionalism nor did the persistence of their rural connections confirm the existence of their primordial loyalties and signify their pre-capitalist culture.

It was once assumed, it sometimes still is assumed, that the interest of Indian society lay in its uniqueness and exceptionalism, in the cultural specificity of tradition, caste and religious community. The sociological and historical evidence of the Indian case is not conventionally expected to provide material for thinking more generally about industrialization and its social consequences. Now it is becoming clear that the sectionalism of the Indian working class was neither a symptom of a pre-capitalist economy nor a derivative of the bonds of village and neighbourhood, caste and religion; rather it was accentuated and developed by industrialization. On the other hand, an increasing sensitivity among historians of the western working classes to the competing and conflicting identities of ethnicity and religion, kinship and gender, neighbourhood and nation has focussed attention upon the very issues which had, in the conventional view, rendered Indian society exceptional in the first place and sometimes even demanded a culturally specific sociology for its proper analysis.

The legacy of Thompson's work has taken varied forms, often indirect and mediated, in studies of the Indian working classes. One historian has

recently adopted his title.³⁸ In some cases, it has been manifested in attempts to track the development of working-class struggles and working-class consciousness; in others, in attempts to portray the social world which workers inhabited, bringing together material conditions, cultural expression and political action into relation with each other; in yet others, historians have focussed upon everyday social relations and everyday resistance, both in relation to work discipline and to their social organization outside the factory, sometimes refracting Thompson's influence through the prism held up by James Scott.³⁹ Thompson's influence upon the historiography of India has been considerable, but its expression, especially in *Subaltern Studies*, has often been at odds with his own historical method and analytical style. Frequently, the Subaltern historians misinterpreted some of Thompson's concepts or sometimes they simply handled them clumsily. They grasped 'moral economy' far too literally as the obverse of a 'market economy'. Thompson's strictures against determinism led them to avert their gaze from the economy and thus obscured their understanding of class formation. Their determination to restore 'the agency' of the subaltern classes precluded the analysis of the state and the dominant classes, but their commitment to concepts of 'hierarchy', dominance and spectacular and unlimited power left little room for subaltern agency. From Thompson, they derived the significance of custom and inheritance, but applying this mechanistically, they emerged with an understanding of tradition that was often Orientalist, and often in such couplings as 'pre-capitalist culture', crudely determinist. In other words, *Subaltern Studies* frequently produced the kind of historical analysis for which, when he encountered it in English history, Thompson saved some of his most coruscating invective.

How can one explain this monumental misinterpretation? Perhaps, it stemmed from a misconceived attempt to find in Thompson's work a set of axioms which could be transposed to India, whereas Thompson himself had refused to subordinate the logic of history to social theory or to wait patiently as a supplicant to catch the whispered wisdom of the Theorist. Perhaps, it showed that the revisionist vision of the Subaltern project was too narrow, seeking to throw Thompson and 'popular culture', later Gramsci and Foucault, into the 'absences' and 'gaps' in Indian historiography rather than to engage more fully with arguments within the discipline as a whole. Perhaps, it shows simply that outstanding works of history cannot be 'applied' or transposed and that their derivatives are condemned to appear as inferior copies.

By the late 1980s, the Subaltern school had drifted away from Thompson and down the road to post-modernity. Increasingly, their project disclosed little coherence beyond the title that bound their volumes together as a slogan. By 1981, when the first volume of *Subaltern Studies* appeared, Thompson's *Making* had acquired the status of a classic and it remained an inspirational text. But it had already been severely interrogated, sometimes by the research it had inspired, and the subject had inevitably moved on.

When *Subaltern Studies* moved towards 'popular culture' in their third volume (1984), its historiographical moment had already begun to pass, not least under the weight of a post-structuralist and Foucauldian critique. They caught Foucault only as the first flush of excitement generated by his work had begun to subside. In relation to these sources, the Subaltern historians had always found themselves a step behind the pack, either applying works whose originality lay in their engagement with historical evidence in specific contexts, usually in the West, or whose conceptual frameworks had already been deployed and sometimes already digested elsewhere. Said's *Orientalism* now offered them a body of 'theory' which dispensed with the need to be subservient to historians writing about other societies and a conceptual framework which could be indigenized.⁴⁰ Its lesson was to show how the Orient had been trapped and victimized by the terms in which it was perceived and described, terms which were themselves integral to, and an outcome of, colonial domination. In representing this colonial discourse, (even as they sometimes unwittingly replicated it), and its Indian victims, it allowed the Subaltern historians to offer themselves, to the growing din of Calcutta's scepticism, as the authentic voice of the subcontinent – even the Third World – while at the same time emancipating themselves from the epistemological thralldom of Western historians.⁴¹ By the later 1980s, *Subaltern Studies* turned increasingly to textual, rather than social, analysis and these were texts which, by their nature, had primarily been written or produced not by subalterns but by elites. In 1981, the Subaltern project had set out 'to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes.'⁴² Its 'historiographical prerogative', according to its champions, had been 'to rewrite the history of colonial India from the distinct and separate point of view of the masses.' As a result, 'the work of the Subaltern scholars' appeared to be nothing less than 'an analogue' for all attempts 'to articulate the hidden or suppressed accounts' of the dispossessed throughout the world. Indeed, *Subaltern Studies*, it is said, had become 'an extension of the struggle between subaltern and elite and between the Indian masses and the British Raj.'⁴³ By the end of the 1980s, for all Edward Said's effusions, *Subaltern Studies* had begun to leave the subaltern out.

This is, perhaps, not in itself entirely surprising. What Sumit Sarkar has called 'the Saidian turn' in *Subaltern Studies* led to an increasing emphasis upon colonial discourse and thus, a growing concern with the intellectual foundations of colonialism. Historians deconstructed colonial discourse in order to expose the Eurocentricity of postcolonial scholarship. In fact, however, the unintended consequence was to restore Eurocentricity to South Asian history. Colonial discourse, it was argued, constructed Indian society and represented its subjects in ways which facilitated their subordination and which they absorbed, appropriated and applied to themselves. It was because forms of authority and dominance at work were embedded in 'working-class culture', Chakrabarty has argued, that workers acquired 'an active presence in the whole process of disciplining'. They were, in other

words, complicit in their own subordination and active agents in the making of their own powerlessness.⁴⁴ Not only did this claim of an encompassing colonial domination deprive the subaltern of any power of agency, but it also suggested that the colonial rulers were the only moving force in Indian history. Thus, the post-modern odyssey beached its crew on familiar shores. Barely three decades ago, there had been a flow of scholarly treatises which held firm to the belief that Indian society sprang from Britannia's helmet. Similarly, the Saidian turn, it has often been suggested, allowed the West to be portrayed in the same essentialized and homogenous terms in which the Orientalist discourse had cast the East.⁴⁵ It was a short step from the homogenization of the West to the assumption that all of India's troubles came from outside. Thus, in Indian history, Sumit Sarkar noted, 'the critique of colonial discourse, despite vast claims to originality, quite often is no more than a restatement in new language of old nationalist positions – and fairly crude restatements at that.'⁴⁶

Moreover, the post-modern critique of universalism has often led, in the hands of the Subaltern scholars, to the unwitting replication of colonial discourse. One aim of the post-modern critique was to release the dispossessed from the universalizing categories of colonial discourse. By stressing fragmentation and plurality, and asserting difference, it sought to enable the suppressed narratives of the dispossessed to be heard and to subvert the dominant discourse which, in particular, had imposed a Eurocentric rationality upon non-Europeans and facilitated their colonization. However, the assertion of difference, with its accompanying search for the true voice of the dispossessed (and not least their authentic representative within the academy) has often led to the reification of subaltern groups and their portrayal in essentialist terms. As Subaltern scholars attempted to assert and claim difference, they have tended to re-affirm assumptions about the culturally specific, unique and exceptional character of Indian society. As a result, they have sometimes been led to restore some of the fondest shibboleths of colonial ideologues – for instance, about the propensity of the working classes to violence,⁴⁷ their susceptibility to rumour,⁴⁸ the paternalism of the expatriate capitalist and the filial deference of their employees⁴⁹ or the centrality of religion to their political consciousness.⁵⁰ This replication of colonial discourse, which arose out of the historian's culturalism, occurred most explicitly when scholars, in pursuit of the fragment, neglected to attend sufficiently to its social and political context.

It is not intended to suggest that we should recoil from the shortcomings of the 'Saidian turn' in Subaltern Studies back to the Thompsonian agenda of thirty years ago. Given some post-modern excursions into social and cultural history, we might be excused a nostalgic glance at *The Making*.⁵¹ However, to insist that post-modernism has nothing to offer is to miss the opportunities it has created. Most significantly, it has cut 'grand narratives' down to size. The metanarratives of class, in any case, had always been rather awkwardly imposed upon the formation of the Indian working classes.

There was here no steady evolution of 'peasants into proletarians', no inexorable process of de-skilling and no clear demarcation between factory labour and the casual poor. Industrial and political action on a massive scale often preceded trade union organization and did not necessarily sustain itself in rising class consciousness. Nationalist rhetoric could sharpen the antagonisms of the working classes against the state and consolidate its support for the communists; but widespread collective action, in the context of political and economic competition sometimes provoked and exacerbated ethnic and sectarian strife. The connections between industrial and non-industrial labour, migrant workers and their rural base, workplace and neighbourhood, gender and skill, caste and the division of labour, trade unions and informal associations suggested that the formation of the working class needed to be examined in its relationship with a wide range of social and political processes.

With its rejection of grand narratives, the post-modern critique has helped to break down the fixity of identities, to decompose social categories and to render their fluidity theoretically explicit. It has – it certainly ought to have – foreclosed the possibility, therefore, that historians might, for instance, too readily adjudicate upon the 'maturity' of the working class whether in terms of its objective conditions or its 'consciousness'. On the contrary, in seeking to allow expression by various groups within the working class, none of them unitary, resistant as groups to further decomposition or incapable of being defined in other terms, the post-modern critique has directed attention to the diversity of relationships which will have to be brought into play in any adequate account of the contingencies, vocabularies and processes by which class was made and un-made. The challenge which it poses is nothing less than how we might write histories of the working classes without assuming the fixity of their multiple and changing identities, or essentializing their popular culture and consciousness. As historians pay closer attention to the shifting, hybrid and plural identities which comprised social relations, so the defining role of politics in class formation, a central and powerful argument of Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, once more becomes increasingly apparent.

NOTES

Photograph by Johnston & Hoffman, 'Jute Production in Bengal, c. 1900', Royal Commonwealth Society collection, Cambridge University Library. Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

1 This paper was originally written for and presented to the conference on 'E. P. Thompson and the Uses of History' organized by History Workshop in London on 8–9 July 1994. The focus of this paper inevitably derives from the purpose for which it was written. Consequently, it reflects upon Thompson's influence on the writing of Indian working-class history. Although it comments on various trends in Indian historical scholarship, it does not set out to offer a comprehensive review either of the historiography of labour in India or of par-

ticular developments within it. I am grateful to Gareth Stedman Jones who first suggested the topic, to those who participated in the conference, and to the editors of the journal, for their comments, and to Amiya Bagchi, Tony Cox and especially David Feldman, for their suggestions.

2 See the perceptive comments of Sanat Bose, 'Indian Labour and its Historiography in the pre-Independence Period' *Social Scientist*, 143 (April 1985), pp. 3–10. See R. K. Das, *Factory Labour in India*, Berlin, 1923; J. H. Kelman, *Labour in India: A Study of Conditions of Indian Women in Modern Industry*, London, 1923; G. M. Broughton, *Labour in Indian Industries*, London, 1924; A. R. Burnett-Hurst, *Labour and Housing in Bombay: a Study in the Economic Condition of the Wage-earning Classes of Bombay*, London, 1925; M. Read, *From Field to Factory*, London, 1927; Raj Bahadur Gupta, *Labour and Housing in India*, Calcutta, 1930; R. K. Das, *Plantation Labour in India*, Calcutta, 1931; R. N. Gilchrist, *Labour and Land*, Calcutta, 1932; Dewan Chaman Lal, *Coolie – The Story of Labour and Capital in India*, Lahore, 1932; S. G. Panandikar, *Industrial Labour in India*, Bombay, 1933; Radhakamal Mukherji, *The Indian Working Class*, Bombay, 1945.

3 N. M. Joshi, *The Trade Union Movement in India*, Bombay, 1927; B. Shiva Rao, *The Industrial Worker in India*, London, 1939; S. D. Punekar, *Trade Unionism in India: A Study in Industrial Democracy*, Bombay 1948.

4 Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, 'From Communism to "Social Democracy": the Rise and Resilience of Communist Parties in India, 1920–1992' *Science and Society*, 61:1, Spring 1997, pp. 99–106.

5 Proceedings of the Meerut Conspiracy Case, Statement by S. A. Dange, Made in the Court of R. L. Yorke, I.C.S., Additional Sessions Judge, Meerut, 26 October 1931, National Archives of India; *Communists Challenge Imperialism From the Dock: Meerut Conspiracy Case, 1929–33: The General Statement of 18 Communist Accused: the Statement Made Before R. L. Yorke, Esq., I.C.S., Additional Sessions Judge, Meerut, U. P. India by R. S. Nimbkar, Accused, on behalf of 18 Communist Accused Mentioned Above*, Calcutta, 1967; Rajani Palme Dutt *India Today*, London, 1947; Indrajit Gupta, *Capital and Labour in the Jute Industry*, Bombay, 1953.

6 Morris D. Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India: A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854–1947*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1965; C. A. Myers, *Labour Problems in the Industrialization of India*, Cambridge, Mass., 1958; Ranajit Das Gupta, 'Factory Labour in Eastern India: Source of Supply, 1855–1946: Some Preliminary Findings' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 13:3, 1976, pp. 277–328; Colin Simmons, 'Recruiting and Organizing an Industrial Labour Force in Colonial India: the Case of the Coal Mining Industry, c. 1880–1939' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 13:4, 1976, pp. 455–85; B. Misra, 'Factory Labour During the Early Years of Industrialization: An Appraisal in the Light of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, 1890' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 12:3, 1975, pp. 203–28; Richard Newman, 'Social Factors in the Recruitment of the Bombay Millhands' in K. N. Chaudhuri & C. J. Dewey (eds), *Economy and Society: Essays in Indian Economic and Social History*, Delhi, 1979, pp. 277–95.

7 Dick Kooiman, 'Jobbers and the Emergence of Trade Unions in Bombay City' *International Review of Social History*, 22:3, 1977, pp. 313–28; E. A. Ramaswamy, *The Worker and His Union: A Study in South India*, New Delhi, 1977; E. D. Murphy, *Unions in Conflict: A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918–1939*, New Delhi, 1981; Richard Newman, *Workers and Unions in Bombay, 1918–29: A Study of Organization in the Cotton Mills*, Canberra, 1981.

8 Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, 1977 edition, first published London, 1963, p. 10.

9 The debate was conducted in the early 1970s primarily in the *Economic and Political Weekly* and reprinted in Utsa Patnaik, (ed.), *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The 'Mode of Production' Debate in India*, Bombay, 1990.

10 Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, 'Capital and Labour in Bombay City, 1928–29' *Economic and Political Weekly*, (17–24 October 1981), pp. PE36–PE44; Newman, *Workers and Unions in Bombay*; Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, 'Workers' Politics in the Mill Districts of Bombay Between the Wars' *Modern Asian Studies*, 15:3, 1981, pp. 603–47.

11 Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900–1940*, Cambridge, 1994.

12 Edward Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' *Past & Present*, 50, February 1971, pp. 76–136.

13 Edward Thompson, 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?', *Social History*, 3, May 1978, pp. 133–65; Edward Thompson, *Customs in Common*, Penguin, 1993, first published, London, 1991, pp. 16–96.

14 Eric Stokes, 'The Return of the Peasant to South Asian History' in Eric Stokes *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India*, Cambridge, 1978, pp. 265–89. These signs were revealed in the work of historians, who later marched under the subaltern banner: notably, Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926–1934: A Study in Imperfect Mobilization*, Delhi, 1978; David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District, 1917–1934*, Delhi, 1981; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute Mill-Hands in the 1890s' *Past & Present*, 91, May 1981, pp. 140–69; but also in the work of others, who did not – for instance, Majid Hayat Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in Northern India: The United Provinces, 1918–1922*, Delhi, 1978; Chandavarkar, 'Workers' Politics'; Kapil Kumar, *Peasants in Revolt: Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh, 1886–1922*, New Delhi, 1984; Chitra Joshi, 'Bonds of Community, Ties of Religion: Kanpur Textile Workers in the Early Twentieth Century' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 22:3, 1985, pp. 251–80.

15 The nine volumes of *Subaltern Studies* were published in 1981 (Vol. 1), 1983 (Vol. 2), 1984 (Vol. 3), 1985 (Vol. 4), 1987 (Vol. 5), 1989 (Vol. 6), 1992 (Vol. 7), 1994 (Vol. 8), 1996 (Vol. 9).

16 Notably, David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, Delhi, 1987; Shahid Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India*, Delhi, 1984; Gyanendra Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919–1922' in Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. I, pp. 143–97; 'Rallying Round the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpur Region, c. 1888–1917' in Vol. II, pp. 60–129; and '“Encounters and Calamities”: The History of a North Indian *Qasba* in the Nineteenth Century' in Vol. III, pp. 231–70; Sumit Sarkar, 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Co-operation, c. 1905–1922', in Vol. II, pp. 271–320; and 'The Kalki-Avatar of Bikrampur: A Village Scandal in Early Twentieth Century Bengal' in Vol. V, pp. 1–53; and perhaps, the most impressive of all, Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992*, Berkeley, 1995.

17 *Subaltern Studies*, taken as a whole, as well as its associated monographs, have been extensively reviewed elsewhere. For a post-structuralist critique of the early volumes see Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Recovering the Subject: *Subaltern Studies* and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia' *Modern Asian Studies*, 22:1, 1988, pp. 189–224; for a thoughtful and measured critique of the influence of Said on *Subaltern Studies*, see Sumit Sarkar, 'Orientalism Revisited: Saidian Frameworks in the Writing of Modern Indian History' *Oxford Literary Review*, 16:1–2, 1994, pp. 205–24; see also Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, 'After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34:1, January 1992, pp. 141–67; on the working classes, see Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'Working Class Consciousness' *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 28, 1990, pp. PE54–PE60; Vinay Bahl 'Class Consciousness and Primordial Values in the Shaping of the Indian Working Class' *South Asia Bulletin*, 13:1&2, 1993, pp. 152–72; for a recent self-assessment, see Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism' *American Historical Review*, 99:5, December 1994, pp. 1475–90, accompanied by assessments of the impact of *Subaltern Studies* in Latin American and African history by Florencia E. Mallon, 'The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History' pp. 1491–1515, and Frederick Cooper, 'Conflict and Correction: Rethinking Colonial African History', pp. 1516–1545.

18 Ranajit Guha, *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, Delhi, 1983.

19 For instance, Gareth Stedman Jones, 'From historical sociology to theoretical history' *British Journal of Sociology*, 27:3, 1976, pp. 295–306; Tony Judt, 'A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians' *History Workshop Journal*, 7, Spring 1979, pp. 66–94; most explicitly, Richard Johnson, 'Thompson, Genovese and Socialist-Humanist History' *History Workshop Journal*, 6, Autumn 1978, pp. 79–100; and the debates which continued through several successive issues of the journal.

20 John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds) *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870–1940*, Cambridge, 1973; Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'Indian Nationalism as Animal Politics' *Historical Journal*, 22:3, 1979, pp. 747–63.

21 Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' in Ranajit Guha, *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1982, pp. 1–8.

22 This, for instance, is a recurrent refrain in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal, 1890–1940*, Princeton, 1989.

23 For example, David Arnold's largely administrative history of the police, *Police Power and Colonial Rule: Madras, 1859–1947*, Delhi, 1986.

24 Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, p. xii and passim. The research-in-progress by Tony Cox, comparing the jute industries of Dundee and Calcutta, suggests that few of the attributes of 'egalitarianism, individualism and democracy' Chakrabarty found to be missing in Calcutta are to be found in early twentieth-century Dundee. Tony Cox, 'The Culture of Resistance of Two Urban Working Classes: the Jute Mill Workers of Dundee and Calcutta, 1918–1939', unpublished paper.

25 Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, p. xiii.

26 Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 92.

27 Thompson, 'Eighteenth-Century English Society', p. 149; Thompson, *Customs in Common*, Ch. 1.

28 It is ironical, therefore, that it was precisely on the basis of asserting the traditional, hierarchical and pre-capitalist character of Indian society that Chakrabarty embarked upon 'rethinking working class history'. Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*.

29 Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', p. 7.

30 Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, p. 186.

31 Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, p. 69; David Arnold, 'Industrial Violence in Colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 13:2, 1980, pp. 234–55.

32 Arnold, 'Industrial Violence'; Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*; Chakrabarty, 'Communal Riots and Labour'; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'On Deifying and Defying Authority: Managers and Workers in the Jute Mills of Bengal, circa 1890–1940' *Past & Present*, 100, (August, 1983), pp. 124–46; Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress*, pp. 131–2, 127–42; Joshi, 'Bonds of Community, Ties of Religion'.

33 The following paragraphs are based upon Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India*.

34 Jacques Pouchepadass, 'The Market for Agricultural Labour in Colonial North Bihar, 1860–1920' in M. Holmstrom, (ed.) *Work for Wages in South Asia*, Delhi, 1990, pp. 11–27; Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Agricultural Labour and Production: Central and South-East Punjab, 1870–1940' in K. N. Raj, N. Bhattacharya, S. Guha and S. Padhi (eds) *Essays on the Commercialization of Indian Agriculture*, Delhi, 1985, pp. 105–62; Prabhu Mohapatra, 'Coolies and Colliers: A Study of the Agrarian Context of Labour Migration from Chotanagpur, 1880–1920' *Studies in History*, new series, I:2, 1985, pp. 13–42; Crispin Bates & Marina Carter, 'Tribal Migration in India and Beyond' in G. Prakash (ed.), *The World of the Rural Labourer in Colonial India*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 205–47.

35 Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism*; Samita Sen, 'Women Workers in the Bengal Jute Industry, 1890–1940', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993.

36 For Bengal, in the preceding and subsequent paragraphs, I have drawn upon Sen, 'Women Workers in the Bengal Jute Industry, 1890–1940'; and Subho Basu 'The Labour Movement in Bengal, 1880–1930', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1994.

37 For a different view, see Parimal Ghosh, 'A History of the Bengal Jute Millhands: Class, Community and Colonial Experience, 1880–1930', unpublished seminar paper, Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge, February 1995.

38 Vinay Bahl, *The Making of the Indian Working Class: the Case of the Tata Iron and Steel Company*, Delhi, 1995.

39 James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, 1985. For an approach which draws upon 'everyday resistance' in Kanpur, see Chitra Joshi, 'The Formation of Work Culture: Industrial Labour in a North Indian City', *Purusartha*, 14, 1992, pp. 155–72. For some recent research on the working classes in India, not already cited, see Dilip Simeon, *The Politics of Labour Under Late Colonialism: Workers, Unions and the State in Chota Nagpur, 1928–39*, Delhi, 1995; Ranajit Das Gupta, *Labour and the Working Class in Eastern India: Studies in Colonial History*, Calcutta, 1994; Parimal Ghosh, 'The Colonial State and Colonial Working Conditions: Aspects of the Experience of Bengal Jute Mill hands, 1881–1930' *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 30, 1994, pp. 2019–27; Janaki Nair, 'Production Regimes, Cultural Processes: Industrial Labour in Mysore' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 30:3, 1993, pp. 261–81; Marina Carter, *Servants, Sirdars and Settlers: Indians in Mauritius, 1834–1874*, Delhi, 1995; Ian Kerr, *Building the Railways of the Raj, 1850–1900*, Delhi, 1995.

40 Sarkar, 'Orientalism Revisited'.

41 For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for the "Indian" Pasts?' *Representations*, 37, Winter 1992, pp. 1–26. Chakrabarty cites with proper demur Inden's lofty judgement that for the first time, with Subaltern Studies, 'Indians are showing sustained signs of reappropriating themselves'. Ronald Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India' *Modern Asian Studies*, 20:3, 1986, p. 445. See also Edward Said, 'Foreword' to Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak Chakravorty (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, New York, 1988; see also Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism'.

42 Ranajit Guha, 'Preface' in Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. 1, p. vii.

43 Said, 'Foreword', pp. vi–vii.

44 Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, pp. 68–9.

45 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, pp. 255–76; Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, London, 1992; Sarkar, 'Orientalism Revisited'.

46 Sarkar, 'Orientalism Revisited', p. 209.

47 See footnote 32 above. I have examined the contemporary discourse of violence and its consequences for the working classes, more fully in Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics, 1850–1950*, Cambridge, 1997, forthcoming, Ch. 5.

48 For a critique of the analysis of rumours in epidemics, see Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, 'Plague Panic and Epidemic Politics in India, 1896–1914' in Terence Ranger & Paul Slack (eds) *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 223–6; for an account of such rumours, see David Arnold, 'Touching the Body: Perspectives on the Indian Plague, 1896–1900' in Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. V, pp. 55–90. See also Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921–2' in Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. III, pp. 1–61.

49 Compare Chakrabarty's account of the paternalism affected by Scottish mill managers in Bengal in *Rethinking Working Class History*, Ch. 5 and the account of Zoe Yolland, *Boxwaulahs: the British in Cawnpore, 1857–1901*, Norwich, 1994, especially her account of her grandfather, Alfred Butterworth, weaving master, Cawnpore Woollen Mills, pp. 249–51.

50 See Shahid Amin, 'Agrarian Bases of Nationalist Agitations in India: An Historiographical Survey' in D. A. Low (ed.), *The Indian National Congress: Centenary Hindsight*, Delhi, 1988, p. 105. in comparison with *Government of India's Despatch on Proposals for Constitutional Reform, dated 20th September 1930, Parliamentary Papers, 1930–31*, Vol. XXIII, p. 695.

51 Marc Steinberg has recently noted that while Thompson's post-structuralist critics 'reify political language in ways quite contrary to the epistemology of the linguistic turn' his 'cultural Marxism at times is truer to the spirit of the revisionist's proffered perspective than their own analyses.' Marc Steinberg, 'Culturally Speaking: Finding a Commons Between Post-Structuralism and the Thompsonian Perspective' *Social History*, 21:2, May 1996, p. 194.