

Colonializing Agriculture

The Myth of Punjab Exceptionalism



Mridula Mukherjee

SAGE SERIES IN MODERN INDIAN HISTORY

Colonializing Agriculture

Other Volumes in the Same Series:

- Volume 1: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India* by Sucheta Mahajan
- Volume 2: *A Narrative of Communal Politics: Uttar Pradesh, 1937–39* by Salil Misra
- Volume 3: *Imperialism, Nationalism and the Making of the Indian Capitalist Class, 1920–1947* by Aditya Mukherjee
- Volume 4: *From Movement to Government: The Congress in the United Provinces, 1937–42* by Visalakshi Menon
- Volume 5: *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution: Practice and Theory* by Mridula Mukherjee
- Volume 6: *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943–47* by Rakesh Batabyal
- Volume 7: *Political Mobilization and Identity in Western India, 1934–47* by Shri Krishan
- Volume 8: *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849–1947* by Tan Tai Yong

Colonializing Agriculture

The Myth of Punjab Exceptionalism

MRIDULA MUKHERJEE

Sage Series in Modern Indian History-IX

SERIES EDITORS

Bipan Chandra
Mridula Mukherjee
Aditya Mukherjee



SAGE Publications

New Delhi • Thousand Oaks • London

Copyright © Mridula Mukherjee, 2005

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

First published in 2005 by

Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd

B-42 Panchsheel Enclave

New Delhi 110017

www.indiasage.com

Sage Publications Inc

2455 Teller Road

Thousand Oaks, California 91320



Sage Publications Ltd

1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road

London EC1Y 1SP

Published by Tejeshwar Singh for Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, typeset in 10/12 Palatino by Star Compugraphics, Delhi and printed at Chaman Enterprises, New Delhi.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mukherjee, Mridula.

Colonializing agriculture: the myth of Punjab exceptionalism/Mridula Mukherjee.

p. cm.—(Sage series in modern Indian history; 9)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Peasantry—India—Punjab. 2. Agriculture—India—Punjab. 3. India—Economic conditions—1918–1947. I. Title. II. Series.

HD1339.I4M85

338.10954'509034—dc22

2005

2005026122

ISBN: 0-7619-3404-9 (Hb)

0-7619-3405-7 (Pb)

81-7829-543-1 (India-Hb)

81-7829-544-X (India-Pb)

Sage Production Team: Abantika Banerjee, Proteeti Banerjee, Anindita Pandey, Girish Sharma and Santosh Rawat.

For ADITYA

Contents

<i>Series Editors' Preface</i>	ix
<i>List of Tables</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xxi
<i>Introduction</i>	xxiv
ONE: Peasants as Tax-Payers	1
The Burden of Land Revenue; Problems with the Method of Assessment; The Land Revenue System and the Small-Holder; A New System; Tax on Irrigation; Government Policy: Contradictions and Dilemma	
TWO: Peasants as Debtors	31
Moneylenders and Moneylending; Debt: Its Scale, Variety and Burden; Distribution of Debt; Causes of Debt; Government and Debt	
THREE: Peasants in the Market	55
Commercialization of Produce; Commercialization of Land; Regional Variation; The Depression	
FOUR: Peasants as Classes	101
Land Ownership; Ownership Holdings and Operational Holdings: Leasing In and Leasing Out; Leasing Out versus Direct Cultivation; Conclusion	
FIVE: Capital Accumulation and Investment	138
Accumulation; Investment; Productivity; Conclusion	
SIX: Punjab and Eastern India:	170
Polar Opposites or Treading the Same Path? Commercialization; Class Structure; Problems of Characterization; Initial Conditions for Capitalist Development; Conclusions	
<i>Bibliography</i>	190
<i>Index</i>	207
<i>About the Author</i>	210

Series Editors' Preface

The Sage Series in Modern Indian History is intended to bring together the growing volume of historical studies that share a very broad common historiographic focus.

In the 50 years since independence from colonial rule, research and writing on modern Indian history has given rise to intense debates resulting in the emergence of different schools of thought. Prominent among them are the Cambridge School and the Subaltern School. Some of us at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, along with many colleagues in other parts of the country, have tried to promote teaching and research along somewhat different lines. We have endeavoured to steer clear of colonial stereotypes, nationalist romanticization, sectarian radicalism and rigid and dogmatic approach. We have also discouraged the "flavour of the month" approach, which tries to ape whatever is currently fashionable.

Of course, a good historian is fully aware of contemporary trends in historical writing and of historical work being done elsewhere, and draws heavily on the comparative approach, i.e., the historical study of other societies, states and nations, and on other disciplines, especially economics, political science, sociology and social anthropology. A historian tries to understand the past and make it relevant to the present and the future. History thus also caters to the changing needs of society and social development. A historian is a creature of his or her times, yet a good historian tries to use every tool available to the historian's craft to avoid a conscious bias to get as near the truth as possible.

The approach we have tried to evolve looks sympathetically, though critically, at the Indian national liberation struggle and other popular movements such as those of labour, peasants, lower castes, tribal peoples and women. It also looks at colonialism as a structure and a system, and analyzes changes in economy, society and culture in the colonial context as also in the context of independent India. It focuses on communalism and casteism as major features of modern Indian development. The volumes in the series will tend to reflect this approach as also its changing and developing features. At the broadest plane our approach is committed

to the Enlightenment values of rationalism, humanism, democracy and secularism.

The series will consist of well-researched volumes with a wider scope which deal with a significant historiographical aspect even while devoting meticulous attention to detail. They will have a firm empirical grounding based on an exhaustive and rigorous examination of primary sources (including those available in archives in different parts of India and often abroad); collections of private and institutional papers; newspapers and journals (including those in Indian languages); oral testimony; pamphlet literature; and contemporary literary works. The books in this series, while sharing a broad historiographic approach, will invariably have considerable differences in analytical frameworks.

The many problems that hinder academic pursuit in developing societies—e.g., relatively poor library facilities, forcing scholars to run from library to library and city to city and yet not being able to find many of the necessary books; inadequate institutional support within universities; a paucity of research-funding organizations; a relatively underdeveloped publishing industry, and so on—have plagued historical research and writing as well. All this had made it difficult to initiate and sustain efforts at publishing a series along the lines of the Cambridge History series or the history series of some of the best US and European universities.

But the need is there because, in the absence of such an effort, a vast amount of work on Indian history being done in Delhi and other university centres in India as also in British, US, Russian, Japanese, Australian and European universities which shares a common historiographic approach remains scattered and has no “voice”. Also, many fine works published by small Indian publishers never reach the libraries and bookshops in India or abroad.

We are acutely aware that one swallow does not make a summer. This series will only mark the beginning of a new attempt at presenting the efforts of scholars to evolve autonomous (but not indigenist) intellectual approaches in modern Indian history.

Bipan Chandra
Mridula Mukherjee
Aditya Mukherjee

List of Tables

1.1	Net income and land tax in British Punjab: Provincial figures (1906–07 to 1938–39)	6
1.2	Land revenue, water rates as percentage of net income and cost of cultivation: Selected holdings in different districts of British Punjab (1928–29, 1930–31, 1937–38)	8
1.3	Land revenue as percentage of net income: Settlement officers' estimates (British Punjab: Different districts)	13
1.4	Gross value of annual product and cost of cultivation: British Punjab—Provincial figures: 1906–07 to 1938–39 (at current prices)	16
1.5	Water rate and value of crops grown on canal-irrigated land in Punjab (1924–25 to 1942–43)	23
1.6	Agricultural taxes (Land revenue and water rates) as a percentage of total provincial revenues: Different provinces of British India (1921–22, 1929–30, 1937–38)	26
3.1	Index numbers of Punjab Food Prices: Annual and ten-yearly moving average: Provincial figures (1841–1920)	58
3.2	Index numbers of harvest prices of selected crops: Punjab (1913–14 to 1943–44)	60
3.3	Amount of land transferred in the Punjab by sale and mortgage (1866 to 1896–97)	72
3.4	Land sales in Punjab: Number of transfers and amount of land sold annually—Provincial figures (1896–97 to 1944–45)	72
3.5	Land mortgage in British Punjab—Provincial figures (1896–97 to 1944–45)	75
3.6	Sale price of cultivated land: British Punjab: Provincial figures (1870–71 to 1900–01)	76
3.7	Price of land, mortgage value of land, and output per acre: British Punjab—Provincial figures (1906–07 to 1940–41)	77
3.8	Price of land; price, yield and value output of wheat in the Punjab: Provincial figures (1871–1941)	80

3.9	Percentage share of agriculturists and non-agriculturists in land mortgage: British Punjab—Provincial figures (1902–03 to 1944–45)	84
3.10	Land revenue and net income in Punjab: Provincial figures (1928–29 to 1938–39)	94
3.11	Index numbers of average gross income, expenditure, and net income of selected holdings in 10 districts of British Punjab (1928–29 to 1938–39)	94
4.1	Distribution of land ownership in British Punjab: Provincial figures (1924 and 1939)	102
4.2	Comparison of cultivating occupancy in Punjab (1887–88 and 1936–37): Area under self-cultivation and area under different forms of tenancy in British Punjab: Provincial figures (1887–88 and 1936–37)	103
4.3	Percentage area owned and operated in various size categories: British Punjab—Provincial and district-wise figures (1920s)	106
4.4	Percentage holdings owned and operated in various size categories: British Punjab—Provincial and district-wise figures (1920s)	108
4.5	Percentage holdings owned and operated in different holding size categories in selected villages in British Punjab (1920s and 1930s)	112
4.6	Percentage holdings and percentage area owned and operated in different holding size categories in a village in Jullundur District (1848–1946)	115
4.7	Social Origins of agricultural and “unspecified” labour in Punjab (1911, 1921, 1931)	129
5.1	Percentage holdings and percentage area operated in units of 15 acres and above: British Punjab—Provincial and district-wise figures (1928)	140
5.2	Migration and land ownership in a village in Jullundur District (1848–1946): Percent of adult males in property groups with different size holdings who have migrated	145
5.3	Military pensions paid to Punjab residents: 1928–29	145
5.4	All-crop, foodgrain and non-foodgrain yield per acre (in rupees: constant prices): Greater Punjab and other regions of British India (1891–92 to 1940–41)	159
5.5	Percentage area sown and yield per acre (in lbs) for major crops in Punjab (1891–1940)	160
5.6	All-Crop yield per acre (in rupees at 1913–14 prices): Punjab (1906–07 to 1941–42)	161

Preface

This book attempts a study of the agrarian economy of Punjab under colonialism. I chose to work on the economic facets of the life of the Punjab peasants because I found that some of the more important questions about peasant politics, the initial focus of interest, could not be answered without a more thorough grasp of the nature of the agrarian economy. Neither the earlier notions of Punjab as “the land of the peasant proprietors”, where indebtedness was a result of prosperity and not poverty, nor the newer theories that heralded the rise of the rich peasant, seemed to quite match the peasants’ political behaviour. A closer examination of the impact of colonialism on the agrarian economy as a whole, and on the agrarian class structure in particular, thus became imperative. I attempt in this work to delineate the nature of the forces that were buffeting the peasants once they became part of the modern world of colonialism. I examine the nature of the burdens of the peasantry, and the impact of the markets in produce, credit, land and labour. I also analyze the degree to which the peasantry had been differentiated and whether or not this process had led to the emergence of classes or groups capable of and willing to invest in agricultural production. I then compare Punjab with other regions of colonial India, and especially with its supposed “polar opposite”, Eastern India, to test the validity of the notion that Punjab deviated sharply from the typical colonial pattern. The Introduction to this volume sets out in greater detail the framework and context of this study of the colonial agrarian economy.

This volume presents one part of a larger study of the political and moral economy of Indian peasants during colonial rule. The other part was recently published as *Peasants in India’s Non-Violent Revolution: Practice and Theory* (Sage Series in Modern Indian History–V). Recapitulating the rationale of the larger study and the architecture of the volume already published might be useful for the reader.¹

¹ The following account is based on the “Introduction” to Mridula Mukherjee, *Peasants in India’s Non-Violent Revolution*, 2004, pp. 16–22.

I The Rationale

Throughout history, peasants have, to put it mildly, been an enigma to those who have tried to deal with them, whether they be monarchs who have tried to govern them or revolutionaries who have tried to lead them; tax-collectors whose job it has been to fleece them or welfare workers who want to get them a better deal; social anthropologists who live with them to know them better or historians who unravel their past to comprehend their present and “imagine” their future.

Their history is simultaneously a story of rebellion and of silent suffering, of collective action and of individualism, of the proverbial peasant guile and the equally proverbial peasant gullibility, of a fierce attachment to home and hearth and of trans-continental migration, of adaptability and stubborn resistance to change, of an urge towards an egalitarian order and the strict observance of hierarchy, of mass conversion to new religions and unbelievable sacrifices to protect the faith of their forefathers, of the best of traditional cultural values and of barbarism, of faithful continuation of centuries-old farming practices and the ready acceptance of new technologies, of abiding by the law and of being notoriously recalcitrant.

These and many other apparent paradoxes in the history of the peasantry of the world are at least partly explained by the very length of the history. The peasantry is, arguably, the oldest “class” in the world. It not only predated but provided the basis for the emergence of the kings, the nobles and the feudal lords, the merchants and the traders. All other social classes are at least a few centuries younger than the peasantry, and the industrial working class almost an infant in comparison.

The sheer longevity of the peasantry’s existence makes one sometimes wonder about the possibility of its immortality. While many of those who lived off its labour and rode piggy-back on it through history have been consigned to the pages of history books, the peasantry has demonstrated an uncanny ability for survival. It has defied the logic of economies of scale that capitalism held up to pronounce its sad but inevitable extinction. It has, with equal doggedness, forced socialism to raise it to life from the ashes of its collective farms, kolkhozes and communes. Those who thought they had sung its last requiem are now singing a new tune whose refrain is “the economic viability of the peasant farm”, and many of us who denied it any rationality now talk about a “peasant rationality”.

Peasants have also shown scant respect for all the sophisticated theories and neat models that have been constructed to explain and predict their behaviour. They have cocked a sly snook at both those who thought their essence was homogeneity and those who differentiated them into petty bourgeois and proletariat and forgot that they were still peasants. “Middle

peasants", who were supposed to cultivate with family labour and have nothing to do with the market, were found to be deeply linked to it and, as in India, were even hiring labour. "Rich", "middle" and "poor" peasants are found so often to be playing roles different from those defined for them by Mao Ze Dong or Eric Wolf that one has begun to wonder whether those categories were at all useful. For example, "poor" peasants who were expected because of their class position to be the most militant, if not revolutionary, have often turned out to be the most docile. And "rich" peasants who were relegated to the "reactionary" end of the political spectrum by being called "kulaks" have just as often been found in the leadership of protest movements. Nor have debates about whether their classification into rich, middle and poor should be made on the basis of size of landholding and access to other resources, or on the basis of family income, or on the basis of the position occupied in the structure of agrarian production relations, taken us very far in answering questions about the political and social and even economic behaviour of the peasantry.

The reasons for the failure of the peasants to live up to the grandiose theories or perfect models built for them lies not so much in their "inherent" unpredictability, but possibly in the very flawed nature of the project of model-building. It is arguably unreasonable to expect that a rich and varied history spread over not only many centuries but millennia, over many continents, distilled through many distinct cultures and civilizations, and spanning many epochs, can be encompassed or encapsulated within any one model or theory, no matter how sophisticated or complex it might be.

Is it reasonable, for example, to expect that a model evolved to explain the experience of Muslim residents of a village in Malaysia in the relatively stable 1970s, in the age of television and mass media, of political parties and elections, as has been done recently by James Scott in his *Weapons of the Weak*, can provide an adequate framework for comprehending peasant activity in other situations even in the twentieth century, for example, in the Mexican revolution, in the Chinese revolution, in the Russian Revolution and in our very own national movement? One can understand the necessity for an emphasis on "everyday resistance" as a counter-foil to the obsession with and glorification of the more dramatic and violent moments of peasant protest. It is also possible to sympathize with the view that peasants have often gained little and sometimes lost heavily from participation in the grand events of history. But can this become the basis for, to use the terminology currently in vogue, "privileging everyday resistance" over all other forms of protest and resistance, for all peasants, in all epochs? Further, even if it is accepted that the peasants of Malaysia in the 1970s were no longer under the ideological hegemony of the landlords and the ruling classes, must this lead to an acceptance of a general theory about the ideological and cultural autonomy of the peasantry?

My reservations about a certain kind of methodology adopted in peasant studies are not, I hope, merely a reflection of the historian's well-founded scepticism about model-building in general. Models built on the basis of an analysis of certain kinds of group behaviour may well be useful tools to comprehend the activities of broadly similar groups in broadly similar conditions. It is my contention, however, that it is as possible to question the validity of a model devised to explain the behaviour of, say, multinational industrial entrepreneurs in the late twentieth century, being used to study the early British industrialists of the eighteenth century, as it is to raise doubts about applying to fourteenth-century German or English peasants, or even early or mid-twentieth-century Chinese or Indian peasants, models built around data gathered from Malay peasants of the late twentieth century. A model built around Malay peasants of the 1970s may well be used, however, to understand contemporary Pakistani peasants, because some of the conditions, such as Islam, and limited democracy, are similar. If the Malay model was to be used for India, it would have to be modified to accommodate at least the difference in the cultural codes as well as the imperatives of a vibrant democracy, to name only a few ready examples.

In the long, and mostly unknown, history of the peasantry, and even in the known history of the Indian peasantry, the story that has been narrated here is but a miniscule part, a mere drop in the vast ocean. For that reason, and for the many others already stated, I do not propose to construct any general model of peasant behaviour.

When this study was conceived, Vietnam had ensured that peasants were still being pursued with vehemence by many whose earlier choices as actors and heroes—workers and students—had refused to fit the revolutionary bill. By the time this study has been completed, the directors of revolutionary drama have moved on to new vistas—women, ethnic and racial minorities (or maybe just women of oppressed minorities), “indigenous” people whose environment and lifestyles have been encroached upon, or, in our own version, a combination of those discriminated against on the basis of caste, religion or ethnicity, and gender. It has been completed in the faith that the relevance of academic pursuits is not determined by the “flavour of the month”, and also because peasants are still very much around, along with their problems, at least in our part of the world, and still continue to excite considerable debate as subjects and objects of strategies of economic, social and political transformation in the past as well as in the present. Besides, who knows what fate awaits those who have failed to learn the lessons taught by Vietnamese peasants, and have thus run the risk of being taught a lesson or two by the peasants of the world's most ancient civilization. The oldest class in the world may yet have a few surprises in store for the world's youngest Imperialism. Peasants may well be back in fashion in the next Spring Collection.

II The Architecture

The companion volume, *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution: Practice and Theory*, attempts to make an intervention in the theoretical debates regarding the role of peasants in revolutionary transformations in the modern world. It does so from the vantage point of the Indian anti-colonial national revolution—a revolution based on a strategy of non-violent action in which the central role was assigned to peasants. The non-violent, yet revolutionary, political practice of peasants in the Indian revolution has been largely ignored in these debates because of the automatic (though unjustified) association of revolution with the large-scale use of violence. While this notion of violence as the essential handmaiden of revolution may have been excusable in the days before unarmed millions with candles and roses as weapons swept away non-democratic regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, in South Korea, in the Philippines and elsewhere, the time has now come to give non-violent revolution its due, and in this to turn our attention to the principal players, namely peasants. Even James Scott, who has otherwise helped in a major way in turning the spotlight away from the exclusive concentration on violent revolution to the non-violent everyday peasant resistance, does not consider the Indian case as worthy of attention, possibly because, being so overtly *political*, it does not fit into his model, which is of *apolitical* everyday resistance.

The political world of the peasants of Punjab (a major North Indian province), which this book constructs in intricate minutiae, forms the substantial part of the empirical base on which the theoretical and methodological discussion conducted in this study rests. In fact, surprisingly for a region that has occupied centre-stage in the story of Indian agricultural development as well as in the political sphere due to Khalistani militancy, this is the first time that the story of the political movements of the peasants of Punjab in the colonial era is being told.

The narrative has been woven together on the basis of many hitherto unused sources in India and the United Kingdom, which include local, provincial and national level official records, newspapers, pamphlets, posters, private papers and institutional papers. Apart from these more conventional archival sources that are the staple of the historian's craft, I have made extensive use of the oral testimony of political activists and participants. This hitherto largely untapped source proved extremely useful not only for supplementing factual information about movements not adequately documented in written sources, but especially for aspects such as ideology, consciousness, social origins of participants, methods of grassroots mobilization, etc., on which, inevitably, written sources are far from adequate. Some of the interviews, which are listed in the bibliography,

were conducted by me on an individual basis, whereas others were conducted as part of the project headed by Professor Bipan Chandra on "The History of the Indian National Movement", in which I, along with some of my colleagues, have been engaged for the last few years.

The story of political practice in rural Punjab, presented in the first part of this book, takes in its sweep both the heroic struggles as well as the no less important everyday politics of peasants. It tries to capture their profile when they were marching with the nation in big national struggles as well as when they were engaged in local struggles on purely class or peasant issues. It treats with equal attention all those who came to the peasant's door—Akalis, Unionists, nationalists of all hues, whether Gandhians, Congress Socialists, Kirti Communists, CPI Communists or radical intellectuals like Professor Brij Narain. It begins with the historical background which brings the story of peasant protest in the colonial period to 1925. It then traces the efforts towards the establishment of peasant organizations by various political groups and parties and the process of the fashioning of an agenda of peasant demands and action. The story moves on to the Civil Disobedience Movement and the activity of peasants as they march along with the rest of the nation, building new links, learning new methods, absorbing new ideas and gaining a new confidence. It then documents the building of the national-level peasant organization and its impact on the movement in the province. It also highlights the process of ideological radicalization, in which the Congress President, Jawaharlal Nehru, played a crucial role, especially during his election tours. This is followed by the stories of many different struggles—the Amritsar Kisan Morcha, the tenants' struggle in the canal colonies, the Lahore Kisan Morcha—as well as of the everyday politics of the Jullundur peasants, who did not have a "morcha" of their own but were arguably the most politically conscious of all. It also looks at the politics of the agrarian legislation initiated by the Unionist Ministry during this phase (1938–39) which marked the high-watermark of peasant upsurge in the Punjab, as it did in many other provinces. This is followed by a discussion of the years 1939 to 1947, which saw major shifts in the political landscape. The Individual Civil Disobedience movement, the Quit India movement, the Communist Party's People's War line, the post-war political ferment and the tragic partition that divided the nation and the province, all impacted on the peasants. I then take up the story of the princely state of Patiala, in which the peasants fought one of their most long-lasting and powerful struggles, covering the years from 1930 to 1953. The inclusion of Patiala enables a comparative look at peasant movements operating within the very divergent political and state structures of autocratic Patiala and semi-democratic British Punjab, which in turn helps in a delineation of the variables that influence the choice of modes and forms of protest.

Some of the more general aspects of the political experience of the Punjab peasants, such as the relationship between peasants, peasant movements and the national movement, forms of protest and methods of mobilization, social origins of leaders and participants, peasant consciousness, etc., are presented in the second part of the book, so that they can be analyzed alongside the experience of peasants from other parts of India and also form part of the broader historiographical debate.

The book subjects to critical scrutiny a wide range of theoretical models used for analyzing peasant consciousness and behaviour. It is particularly critical of the framework offered by Subaltern Studies, which it subjects to a thorough and elaborate critique. It argues that the concrete political practice of Indian peasants, which it documents in detail, does not match Subaltern theory, especially the notions of autonomous consciousness, subaltern/elite antagonism, privileging of violent resistance as essentially subaltern, etc. While appreciating many of its profound insights, it also questions certain elements of the Marxist understanding of the peasantry, especially with reference to the relationship between class and nation.

In a similar fashion, the work of scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm, Eric Wolf, Jean Chesneaux, Lucien Bianco, James Scott, Theda Skocpol, Theodor Shanin and Barrington Moore, who have made important contributions to peasant historiography, is critically analysed with the objective of sifting out what is useful for the understanding of the Indian case and of questioning those generalizations which are thrown into doubt by the actual practice of Indian peasants. It argues that the actual political practice of the Indian peasants, representing one-sixth of humanity, refuses to fit into the theoretical straitjackets provided for it and demands new theoretical and methodological space, some of which this study has sought to create. It rejects the widely prevalent notion that peasants' consciousness remains traditional even when they indulge in "revolutionary" action, and argues that they can and do indeed acquire, in the Indian case, a modern anti-colonial, democratic and even "class" consciousness.

The discussion on historiography is organized thematically in the second part of the book, which begins with a detailed critique of the Subaltern and Marxist writings on the subject of peasants and anti-colonial nationalism, and argues for an alternative perspective. I then examine the debate around the issues of violence and non-violence, and present a detailed account of the forms of struggle and methods of mobilization adopted by peasants. This is followed by a focus on the relationship between peasants and outsiders and also the social origins of leaders and participants. I then suggest some elements of an alternative framework for analyzing peasant consciousness by means of a close look at the issues which aroused different strata of the peasantry to struggle, and also examine the sources of legitimacy