

CHAPTER 3

BHILWARA

NATURAL GEOGRAPHY

Location ¹

The principal township of the district named after it, Bhilwara is situated at the intersection of latitude 25°21' North and longitude 74°39' East. This location is a little below the Tropic of Cancer just outside of the southern perimeter of the Thar Desert which is bisected by the Indo-Pakistan border. (The location is indicated diagrammatically on Map 1.)

The township sits on an elevated plateau 380 metres above sea level. The significance of this geographical feature will become apparent as Bhilwara's history unfolds. At this stage, it is sufficient to point out that Udaipur, the political capital of the erstwhile Mewar state lies deep in a valley surrounded, almost to the point of inaccessibility, by the Aravalli mountain range. Bhilwara, to Udaipur's north east, is situated in the centre of a vast plain and while exposed in a "military" sense, the town is advantageously placed "commercially".

Climate

While the bounds of the Thar desert do not extend to Bhilwara, the climate of the town is nevertheless inclined to be arid. During May, at the height of summer, the mean daily temperature varies between 26°C minimum to 40°C maximum with the maximum sometimes

rising to 45°C. Between mid-November and the end of the following January, mean daily temperatures vary from between 24°C maximum to 7°C minimum. Just as heat waves strike in mid-summer, so do cold waves in mid-winter when night temperatures sometimes plummet to below freezing point.

During the monsoonal months of July and August, relative humidity is over 60% while, in the driest part of the year, afternoon humidity may drop to 20%. West to south-west winds prevail during monsoon. In post-monsoonal months and during winter, winds come from northern and westerly directions. Skies are moderately to heavily clouded during monsoon and occasionally clouded in winter.

In 30 years out of the period, Bhilwara's rainfall was less than 39% of the normal annual average of 699 mm and 87% of Bhilwara's annual rainfall was received during monsoon. On average, there are 32 rainy days each year with a daily rainfall averaging 2.5 mm. The irregular and highly erratic cycle of rainfall interspersed with drought and famine is a feature of the local climate which, historically, has handicapped the economic development of Bhilwara and continues still to disaffect economic commerce and production.²

Geology and Hydrology

Of the range of mineral deposits available for exploitation, mica, asbestos, soapstone, and stone-slabs are the minerals in most commercial abundance. Four main rivers flow through the district. These are the Banas and its three tributaries, Berach, Kothari and Khari. The Banas flows six kilometres south of Bhilwara township.

It is not a perennial river - except after monsoonal rainfall. The river is more usually a chain of small pools and, indeed, for some months of the year, it may be completely dry. The bed of the Banas is rock and what water penetrates the bed is retained under the surface to percolate into wells which have been sunk on either side of the banks.

The Kothari River flows through the municipal boundaries. The Kothari too would not be perennial save that it has been artificially dammed, first, at Meja in neighbouring Mandal tahsil and, again, at Kotri in Kotri Tahsil. High compaction and low permeability of surface rock are not conducive to abundant conservation of underground water. Moreover, the watertable lies eight to 18 m below ground surface. In Bhilwara and its adjoining tahsils, a well can yield from between 6,000 to 80,000 L of water per day. Although underground water is slightly alkaline, it is suitable enough for purposes of irrigation and consumption.³

The potential for water conservation in the region of Bhilwara was recognised at the turn of the century. While Meja and Kotri were selected as the best sites for bunds, construction did not occur until 50 years later.⁴

Flora and Fauna

Natural forest now occupies slightly less than 20% of the total area of the district and existent forest is concentrated largely towards the district's south-east corner. Surface vegetation comprises palms, xerophyllic trees, grasses and chapperal.

Staple cereals cultivated in the district are predominantly wheat, barley and maize. Cotton and sugar cane is also cultivated. Am and papita are grown in domestic gardens. Oil is extracted from cotton and peanuts for culinary purposes.

Indigenous species of wildlife are now in depleted numbers. Goats, camels, donkeys, oxen, cows and buaffaloes are domesticated species which are grazed, worked, milked and have their hides tanned for leatherwork.⁵

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

The District of Bhilwara measures east to west 144 km (approximately) and from north to south 104 km (approximately). As an administrative district, Bhilwara came into existence in October 1949, following the merger of Mewar and Shahpura States into the United States of Rajasthan which took place in 1948. The modern Bhilwara District absorbed Shahpura and two former administrative units of Mewar, Bhilwara and Rajasamand.⁶

In area Bhilwara is 10,4448 km² and, within Rajasthan, the District ranks as fourteenth in size. In terms of population as at 1981, the district supports 1,308,500 persons of whom 122,338 live in urban Bhilwara.

Bhilwara District is divided into 11 tahsils of which that of Bhilwara is the most populous. It is within this particular tahsil that this study is confined.

Of the four towns within the boundaries of the district, Bhilwara is not only the largest in terms of population but that with the largest growth rate. For official census purposes, Bhilwara has been classified as Class II town (having a population between 50,000 and 100,000 persons (82,155 - 1971 Census) within its municipal confines).⁷

Civic administration is dispensed by a municipal council. Town planning is directed by an Urban Improvement Trust in consultation with the civic administration.

Map 2 illustrates the district and tahsil boundaries and Map 3 contains a plan of the Bhilwara municipality. Indeed, Bhilwara bears the distinction of being the first town of the erstwhile Mewar state to be vested with local self-government in post-Independence times. In area, the municipality occupies 119.1 km².⁸

URBAN SETTLEMENT AND LAND USE PATTERN

The accompanying map displays the pattern of land use and human settlement which currently exists within Bhilwara's municipal bounds. In the pre-Independence era, Bhilwara's settlement was confined to the area now called Gulmandi. Mewar Textile Mills, the railway station, the occasional large bungalow belonging to a factory or mine owner, and couple of mining depots were the only substantial settlements outside of Gulmandi. The topographical area affected by expanded settlement over 35 years has increased nearly sevenfold.

For electoral and postal purposes Bhilwara is divided into wards

but, for the moment, it suffices to survey the city by locality. The name of each locality is listed below together with the approximate date of settlement.⁹

Table 1 Bhilwara localities and approximate years of origin

Locality	Year	Locality	Year
Azadnagar	1980	Jahawanagar	1955
Bapunagar	1977	Kasiquri	1974
Bhimganj	1950	Patch	1925- 1950
Bhupalganj	1925-1950	Pratapnagar	1958
Gandhinagar	1932-1938	Pur	pre-1818
Gulmandi	pre-1818	Radhakrishna Colony	1955
Industrial Area	1968	Sanganer	pre-1818
Industrial Estate	1968	Scindunagar	1965
		Subashnagar	1975

It has been said that "morphologically" Bhilwara is quite uncharacteristic of Mewar in that, while the city's original habitations were walled-in and fortified, no fortress or keep existed. Indeed, not even religious buildings form special focal points. Moreover, while Bhilwara is of colonial foundation, there is even not a sign of conformity with the structures of British cantonments of the contemporary period.¹⁰

Azadnagar, formerly part of Gandhinagar was all agricultural field when the author visited Bhilwara in 1975. Now the area is occupied by privately owned modern bungalows (all of which, incidentally, were built illegally, the necessary town planning ordinances not being issued until mid-1982).¹¹

As with the other newer areas, the streets and thoroughfares of Gandhinagar and Azadnagar have been planned in typical checkerboard

fashion. Several important public utilities are situated in Gandhinagar, viz: dak bungalow and circuit house, police lines (including radio-communications unit and armory), dharmkanta, large Hindu temple, mosque, Muslim cemetery, and stop for Udaipur bound buses.

Bapunagar lies on the Pur Road between Pur and Bhilwara. The locality is occupied by a public housing estate, the construction of which finished only in 1978. One of Bhilwara's two water reservoirs stands adjacent to the estate.

Bhimganj and *Bhupalganj* connect Gulmandi with the railway station via the common thoroughfare, the New Cloth Market. Lying to the north, *Bhimganj* embraces the Mahatma Gandhi Public Hospital (established 1953),¹² a TB hospital, private medical practices, two cinemas, the district collectorate, two public parks, the local parade-ground, two private schools, a public middle-school, female ashram, police station, telegraph and telephone office, district court house, mosque and serai. There is also a mixture of retail shops, restaurants, godowns, commercial offices and residential tenements.

In comparison with Gulmandi, streets are sufficiently wide to be divided by a median strip. Hence, in contrast with the bottlenecks of pedestrians and vehicles which choke Gulmandi, traffic flows in the business district are more free.

Bhupalganj lies to the south of the New Cloth Market and embraces MLV Government College, Seth Murlidhar Mansinghka (MM) College for Girls, a girls higher secondary school, a sports stadium, the head post office, the city's banks, the municipal offices, a fire station, the police headquarters, the city's newest cinema, the oldest

public park, and most of the city's private hotels and guest houses. The plan of the area was devised by G.C. Chenevix Trench, ICS, a British revenue settlement officer attached to the Mewar Durbar.¹³

Gandhinagar is separated from Gulmandi by the city's business district, the railway line and the highway. Gandhinagar is also the locus of the city's industrial expansion. The mica mining concern of Duduwala and Company established its works here in the inter-war years. Duduwalas' entree was followed by construction of the Mansinghka compound (another mica mining enterprise), and the emergence of Mewar Textile Mills (MTM) in 1938.

Since 1947, Gandhinagar has seen several more textile mills, the largest being Rajasthan Spinning and Weaving Mills, and Rajasthan's first vanaspati factory.¹⁴ Substantial tracts of agricultural land were resumed in the early 1960s for industrial sites (these are known as the Industrial Area and the Industrial Estate). Land left for residential purposes has been rapidly developed. MTM's compound also contains a private school, Vidhya Niketan, which was founded as a trust by the present millowner. The school is fee-paying and caters to children from infants to junior secondary standard.¹⁵

Gulmandi also known as "Old Bhilwara" is a maize of irregularly planned chowks, bazaars, stone and cement tenements, interspersed with mud hutments. Dwellers in this part of the city tend to be of poor socioeconomic condition. Although the oldest temple of historical Bhilwara is situated in Gulmandi, the settlement of Muslim inhabitants is higher than in other localities. Along the main thoroughfare Muslims ply their livelihood as costermongers, cloth merchants,

butchers, carpenters or masons. In times of communal hostilities, this thoroughfare is the scene of violence and riot.

Jahawanagar is an area of significance because it contains the first public labour colony to be constructed in Rajasthan. The long barrack-like buildings date from 1955.¹⁶ The electricity grid which services Bhilwara with power is also located here.

Kasiquri is a private residential area on the city's southern boundary. Houses are of very superior design and construction and mostly of two-storey construction. In marked contrast to the residential affluence of the rest of the locality, there stands Bhilwara's Harijan busti. Of interest are the depots of the Food Corporation of India beyond which is a small Christian graveyard.

Patch occupies four city blocks within Bhupalganj and is an agglomeration of small mechanical and electrical machine shops which specialise in either the manufacture of small motor components or motor repairs. Around the clock, the lorries of public carriers undergo overhauls or repairs. The commodious bungalow of the Mansinghka family, "Pusa Niwas", nests in a spacious garden, a veritable oasis amidst congestion and noise of the Patch.

Pratapnagar lies on the Pur Road between Gandhinagar and Jahawanagar. Pratapnagar embraces also the eastern side of the labour colony but its geographical centre is Bhupal Mining Works where the large-scale manufacture of mica-insulated bricks commenced in 1958. The area now includes three other important public utilities, viz. Pratapnagar Higher Secondary School, Employees Insurance

Hospital, and Bhilwara Industrial Training Institute (ITI).

Pur lies on the city's western extremity. Nine kilometres divides *Pur* from Bhilwara proper and the public commuter services between the two places already generate heavy traffic and are still insufficient to meet public demand. Nearby subdivision for residential and commercial construction is occurring. *Pur* enjoys local popularity for the quality of tobacco leaf cultivated there and for the bidi cigarettes manufactured from it. The closest industrialisation to *Pur* is the Mahavir Mica Insulation Brickworks.

Radhakrishna Colony is Bhilwara's "civil lines". Living quarters for the civil servants in state employment are provided here. Several public utilities have been situated in this locality, these include the public bus terminal, district gaol, the agricultural cooperative produce market, and the city's second water reservoir.

Sanganer stands at the easternmost extremity of the municipal bounds and, while it remains still little more than a village, the rate of subdivision and residential construction suggests that the locality is fast becoming suburban. Industrial developments (a rubber factory in particular) are planned for the area. *Sanganer* was absorbed into the municipality in 1971.¹⁷

Scindunagar, as the name suggests, is occupied by refugees from the Sind and western Punjab (which now form part of Pakistan) and their descendants. The religion of the residents is predominantly Sikh though a small number of Hindus and Muslims live there as well. A gurudwara has been built there and a small Adventist kindergarten operates also. Settlement would have occurred in the decade 1955-65.

Subashnagar is Kasiquri's northern counterpart. In allocation of space for public gardens and recreation, Subashnagar has been generously planned. The Urban Improvement Trust's offices are located here and apart from this amenity plus the depot of the district dairy cooperative, Subashnagar is entirely a modern residential area - indeed, the affluence accrued by its residents is reflected occasionally by contemporary architecture of the most bizaare conception.

In summary, Bhilwara's population remains most concentrated in the area of oldest settlement, Gulmandi, from which, over the last 50 years, settlement has extended to the railway line and then expanded in three directions, each direction following a major transport artery, viz. north towards Mandalgarh along the Mandalgarh Road and rail link (Radhakrishna Colony and Subashnagar), south towards Chittorgarh along the Chittorgarh Road and rail link (Kasiquri) and west towards Pur along the Pur Road (Gandhinagar, Azadnagar, Jahawanagar and Bapunagar).

HISTORICAL BHILWARA

Pre-1818

Bhilwara has an established pre-history and protohistory and, although the area is rich in archeological discoveries, these discoveries are but of peripheral interest to the topic. The research therefore is focused towards the period from 1818, the date from when the city's commercial origins can be dated with certainty, until the present time.

Tradition claims that the name Bhilwara originates from aboriginal tribespeople, Bhils, which inhabited the place. In Bhilwara's days of origin, agriculture, grazing, and hunting would have occupied the daily lives of inhabitants only in peacetime, for, throughout its mediaeval period, Bhilwara was repeatedly captured, lost, and recaptured by outside invaders.

At first, Bhilwara was captured as a domain of the infant Rajput state of Mewar. It was later overrun by the Lodi sultans of Delhi to be retaken by Mewar. Bhilwara was then lost to the Mughals, again to be restored to Mewar. Secondly, in the 18th century, Mewar was embroiled in conflict with invading Mahrattas and Pindaris during which Bhilwara and its environs were several times sacked and Mewar's armies routed. In 1806 Bhilwara was known to possess 3,000 inhabitants but when British intervention occurred in 1818, Bhilwara was a ghost town.¹⁸

1818

The scale of devastation, plunder, and exaction inflicted by

repeated Maratta and Pindari incursions was such that the rulers of the Rajput states had little alternative but to accept the British East India Company's offers of protection. So depleted was Mewar (the historical "fidei defensor" of Hinduism in Rajputana) of regular military force raised within its own estates it was reduced to hiring mercenary Sindis. Lieutenant-Colonel James Tod was the company's agent for the Rajput states and negotiated a treaty with the ruler of each state. Broadly, the terms of the treaties guaranteed protection of sovereign territory, lawful succession of the ruler, and maintenance of internal peace. In return, the ruler was guided politically by the company's resident adviser, obliged to disband native armies, proscribed from entering into any other foreign treaty, and required to pay an annual tribute to the company's treasury.

Tod's depressing description of Mewar at the time of the negotiations reads as follows:

But so much had [Mewar] been defaced through time and accident that with difference could the lineaments be traced with a view to their restoration, her institutions a dead letter, the prince's authority despised, the nobles demoralized and rebellious, internal commerce abandoned, and the peasantry destroyed by the combined operations of war, pestilence and exile.¹⁹

It has been written that, at least territorially, the Rajput states were metaphorically "put on ice" by the treaties of 1818. However, the efficacy of a treaty depended on the deployment of efficient but expensive forces of the East India Company, a company expense which a Rajput state's tribute was intended to defray. If the company's treaty with Mewar was to carry conviction with regard to payment of tribute, a stimulus to revenue had to be administered in order to

generate a source of tribute.

Chittorgarh and Udaipur were fortress cities embedded in a mountain range inaccessible to mercantile trade. Towns such as Kankroli and Nathdwara were not only mountainous but deosthan. As a means of recovering tribute, certain khalsa areas were assigned to the East India Company as "reserved" parganas and, in the Bhilwara region these "reserved" parganas included Pur, Sanganer and Mandalgarh, their revenues (and revenue administrations) being "reserved" for first claim by the company as contribution to tribute.

Sitting at the centre of a vast plain in the midst of a triangle of "reserved" parganas and on the side of the state closest to the company's principal agency at Ajmer, Bhilwara was ideal as a centre of commerce. The only obstruction to its establishment as such a centre was the plunder inflicted by occupying Bhil and Mina tribes-people, the very excuse needed to clear the tract.

A second reason prompting mercantile stimulation was the lean supply of skilled labour. As the previous insecurity of Mewar had led either to waste or periodic exactions of chauth by the marauders, domicile in the region carried a high personal risk and risk of loss of fixed and moveable property. It was therefore not surprising that the cost of credit and wages should exceed not only that of neighbouring states but also that of British territory. The shortage of credit and skilled craftsmen continued until after the Mutiny.

There was further reason for prompting commerce. The traditional Mewari formula governing land rights and rights to produce was

basically one whereby the cultivator held the right to a specified parcel of land but the produce cultivated on that land belonged to the sovereign. In fact, before the state could claim portion of an individual cultivator's produce, portions were deducted pro rata for up to 13 officials and artisans within the local community. The restricted claims of the crown were exacerbated further, especially in Bhilwara, by the extent to which cultivable lands were mortgaged. As the mortgagee, usually a patel, had substantial rights to produce also (sometimes up to one quarter) and as mortgages remained undischarged for up to four and five generations of landholders, the quantum of claims leviable on the mortgagor, was large enough to keep the cultivator and state constantly impoverished and the condition of the third party, the mortgagee patel was only marginally better. Hence, progressive increase in state revenues was contingent either on the ability of cultivators to discharge their encumbrances or on the patels to generate income by means other than mortgage finance.²⁰

A fourth possible reason was that, however shrouded or peculiar the history may have been, Bhilwara possessed a mint and had done so since at least the time of the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II.²¹

In expectation that it would eventually rise to become the emporium of Central India, Tod inaugurated a cloth market at Bhilwara. By 1819, 1,200 new houses had been constructed which, by 1822, had increased to 2,700. Tod could boast:

Bhilwara is perhaps the most conspicuous instance in all India of the change which our predominant influence has effected in four short years ... With proper management this place might become the Chief mart of Rajputana and ten thousand houses would soon find inhabitants, such are its capabilities as an entrepot.²²

Reginald Heber, second Bishop of Calcutta, toured through Bhilwara in 1825 and recorded:

It is a large town without any splendid buildings, but with a number of neat houses, four long bazaars, and a greater appearance of trade, industry and moderate but widely diffused wealth and comfort than I had seen since I left Delhi. The streets were full of hackeries laden with corn and flour, the shops stored with all kinds of woollen, felt, cotton and hardware goods, and the neatness of the workmanship in iron far surpassed what I should have expected to see. Here too everybody was full of Captain Tod's praise. The place had been entirely ruined by Jamshid Khan and deserted by all its inhabitants when Tod persuaded the Rana to adopt measures for encouraging the owners of land to return and foreign merchants to settle; he himself drew up a code of regulations for them, obtained them an immunity from taxes for a certain number of years and sent them patterns of different articles of English manufacture for their imitation. He also gave money liberally to the beautifying of their town. In short, as one of the merchants who called on me said, "It ought to be called Todganj but there is no need for we shall never forget him."²³

RAJPUT RULE

The social history of Bhilwara cannot be fully understood without reference to the evolving system of "paramountcy" whereby the sovereignty of a Rajput treaty prince was significantly constrained by the actions and policies of the British paramount power but a brief appreciation of the nature of Mewar as a Rajput state is first necessary.

Until 1947, the modern state of Rajasthan (land of rajas) comprised 19 treaty states collectively called Rajputana ("the domain of rajputs - the sons of kings"). It has been argued whether the Rajputs have historically constituted a tribe or a caste. While Rajputs would hardly

conform to a conventional tribal definition they have maintained traditionally a strong network of blood ties despite a wide geographical dispersion. Moreover, ethnologically speaking, Rajputs' origins, though obscure, were from migratory tribes foreign to India.

It is believed that at least some Rajputs descended from Hun tribes which invaded and occupied North West India in the ninth century, CE. The tribes became Sanskritised and, in order to establish kshatriya caste status, obtained solar and lunar geneologies from the Brahmins.

Rajputs are divided into gotras, the major ones of which are Sisodia, Chauhan, Khachchwa, Rathore, Solanki and Tauar. Only the Sisodias are likely to have their ancestry in the original Hun invaders. Those of other lineages are more likely to have descended from Sanskritised indigenous tribespeople.

In antiquity, the distinction between Brahmin and Kshatriya was not rigidly observed. For various reasons, it may have been advantageous or necessary for a Brahmin to assume a warrior's occupation. In such cases the Brahmin was called "Brahmo-Kshatriya", a title sometimes applied to Sisodia Rajputs, the chief of whom has been the hereditary rana of Mewar.²⁴

The Sisodias have been regarded as the premier Rajput clan and Mewar as the premier Rajput state. The reason derives neither so much from the ranas' identity with the highest Hindu caste nor from an amass of wealth or territory (in fact, in terms of size and wealth, Mewar's rank would be exceptionally modest) but from a long martial history: Mewar defied repeatedly alignment with the Lodi Sultanate and later with the Mughal Empire.

Until 1568, Chittorgarh was the Mewar capital. It was sacked that year by the Mughal ruler, Akbar, when 30,000 of the fort's defenders were massacred and the Rajput women immolated themselves with fire, the rite of johar. The capital was transferred subsequently deep into the Aravallis and named Udaipur.

The exploits of Rana Pratap Singh and his mount "Chetak" are ingrained in the region's cultural heritage. Pratap's memory to this day is honoured by hotel signs, cinemas, even trademarks on school stationery. "Chetak's" commemoration is best known by the daily express train which connects Udaipur with Delhi. Mewar court etiquette, which survived into this century, proscribed the shaving of courtiers' beards and the eating of food from anything but plates of pipul leaves: these observances served as reminders of the privations which Rana Pratap suffered in flight from Mughal pursuit.

Even when George V visited India for his coronation durbar in 1911, Maharana Fateh Singh deliberately took poison in order to induce an illness which would honourably excuse him, not so much from paying homage to a British king-emperor, but doing so at Delhi, the former Lodi and Mughal capital.²⁵

Though the title of rana or maharana held imperial connotations, it did not imply autocratic absolutism. In relation to the feudatory nobility, the "imperial" status was more akin to that of a primus inter pares. The "first among equals" relationship manifested itself in three ways. First, the highest rank of nobles, the sardars, took precedence over the maharaj kanwad, the heir apparent. Secondly, feudal title to most of the estates was held by individual nobles rather

than the ruler. Lastly when a ruling maharana died without heir, natural or adopted, the successor was appointed by the sardars.²⁶

James Tod himself understood explicitly the historic web of kinship which characterised the Rajputs as a group and also the prestige which specially attached to the Sisodias. He understood the key role which the ruler of a given state would have to play in relation to his nobles if a stable economic and political structures were to be achieved. In states where the ruler has attained unchallenged supremacy, this line of politicoeconomic understanding and policy development was valid. However, the political and economic structure of Mewar was not typical of Rajputana. While Tod's long domicile in Mewar is of times attributed to sentimental attachment to the place (after all, he did once write "Mewar, I love thee dearly"),²⁷ the internal structure of Mewar made consolidation difficult and the overwhelming (almost religious) prestige which Mewar enjoyed among Rajputs was the psychological pivot of the East India Company's entire system of Rajput alliances.

The mystique enshrining Mewar and the Sisodias could manifest itself politically in peculiar ways, even during this century. Successive Agents to the Governor-General (AGG) in Rajputana would defer to the Mewar maharana's arbitration on disputes over etiquette, protocol, or matter internally affecting any Rajput family, be it royal or noble. Without immediate retribution, Mewar declined to put its soldiers at the service of the British during World War I (though the state did give cash assistance).²⁸ In 1930, the Nizam of Hyderabad made a public statement in support of the Round Table Conferences convening in London. As the statement had the effect of stemming the tide of

the nationalist civil disobedience movement in South Indian native states, a petty Madras magistrate suggested to the Viceroy's Political Secretariat that a similar statement from a ruler in Rajputana could mitigate civil disobedience in the northern states. The suggestion was accepted and the choice of ruler who should make the statement fell between the educated, cosmopolitan, and affable Maharaja Sir Ganga Singh of Bikaner and the sheltered, crippled and suspicious Bhopal Singh, regent of Mewar. The AGG, Rajputana, and advisers in the secretariat were unanimous in their views that a statement of support would have the desired impact only if it were to issue from Mewar.²⁹ Lastly, as late in 1947, the amicable and speedy accession of the majority of the Rajput states to an independent India received an inestimable impetus through Mewar's lead.

MEWAR'S POLITICAL STRUCTURE

To comprehend the wider institutional structures which influenced the pace and shape of Bhilwara's development, this interval will be used to scrutinise these structures more closely.

In antiquity, the Mewar nobility was comprised almost wholly of Sisodia Rajputs. Whereas in Britain, Norman kings offset the threat of local concentrations of power by dispersing the estates of their nobility, titles to noble estates in historical Mewar were rotated as a similar precaution but the extent and duration of this practice is unknown.

Although Rajputs other than Sisodias made inroads to Mewar feudatory estates, this process was by no means a disordered one. On the contrary, Sisodia control over Mewar's peace and defence

depended on the careful disposition of feudal domains among regional heads of Rajput gotras. In the first place, as a counterbalance to rivalries within the Sisodia gotra, the maharana had to rely on non-Sisodia nobility. In the second place, the maharana's khalsa lands were the richest in Mewar territory and lay largely in the territorial heart. Protection of khalsa was buffered by the thikana estates distributed concentrically along the state's borders - the nobles' reward for acting as frontier defenders was the exclusive right of government over the domains assigned to them. As late as 1941, the percentage proportion of khalsa villages to thikana was 31% to 69%. This proportion was in marked contrast to those of other Rajput states where jagidari lands rarely exceeded 40% of the whole.³⁰

Proprietorial right to a thikana (which could embrace one or more villages) could only be held by a Rajput and express title to the right could only issue from the crown. Proprietorship of a thikana was inalienable save by inheritance which, as a system of succession, operated on the principle of male primogenitor (or in the absence of direct male issue, the nearest surviving male relative). In the case of succession being exhausted, the title to the estate concerned could be granted anew to another Rajput. Proprietorship could be revoked by the crown only in cases of revolt, treason, default, sedition, capital crime, absconding, or similar breach of fealty or contumacious conduct.

Except where a fraction of land might be kept for the thakur's own private use, or as deosthan, proprietorial right to land under cultivation was held by the cultivator himself but the maharana and his vassal thakur had revenue rights over the produce extracted

therefrom.

A cultivator's root of land title vested in an express grant by the thakur and the cultivator's proprietorship too was inalienable. Only when convicted for serious criminal offence or for absconding from the village or for sedition or seditious conspiracy could a cultivator be deprived of his land. A cultivator's proprietorship was heritable on the male primogenitor principle. Military service and various cesses could be required of the thakur from thikana cultivators.

In simple terms, the Mewari thikana system was a fixed and rigid structure and operation. The Rajput thakur had proprietorial right over the revenues of his thikana cultivating villages whose domicile was as fixed as their land rights. The village cultivator could possibly enhance his entitlement to cultivable land only to lose a greater proportion of his produce. The jajmani aspect of this nexus of relationships is also important to note. The Kshatriya Rajput could guarantee civil administration and military defence for the guarantee of the "spoil and toil" of the inhabitants of the area vested in his jurisdiction.

The Mewari nobility was divided into three main ranks. The sardars, numbered 19 (of which were 11 Sisodia) and attended court only on special invitation upon festivals and solemn ceremonies. As hereditary counsellors of the maharana, the sardars were members of the darbar.

Nobles of the second rank numbered 34 and were required to attend court more regularly. These fujdars and officer corps of

the state forces were selected from this rank. The gole ka sardars, nobles of the third rank, were rostered to attend the maharana's person and to act as a standing force should sardars or foujdars oppose the maharana's rule.³¹

The chiefs of Banera and Shapura (whose former estates now form part of Bhilwara District), held the title of raja and were so powerful as to be autonomous. In fact, Shapura's historical root of title originated with a treaty made with the Mughals rather than one made with the maharana. (The British Viceroy's Political Department regarded Shapura as nominally affiliated to Mewar but, as a reward for the raja's amenability to British political direction, the chiefship was recognised as a separate state in 1921.)³²

The cultivator on a thikana inherited a proprietorial right to soil but not to its produce. Hence the thakur could tax produce on his estate as tribute (and this amount was usually fixed). The thakur, in turn, paid a fixed tribute to the durbar, attended court, and provided horse and troops when called on. However, if the maharana's regular forces seemed to be growing to an extent where they posed a threat to the individual autonomy of the nobles, the nobility could combine either to refuse troops or conspire to overthrow the ruler.

In the administration of justice and in the regulation of internal economy, government of the estates of the sardars was imperium in imperio and a miniature replica of the maharana's own government: a sardar's sub-vassals were assigned land and provided the sardar with quotas of troops, attended his person, and acted as hereditary counsellors. Indeed, not until after the Mutiny were the nobles' powers of trying criminal cases formally defined. As a British observer

noted once, "The feudal system holds [as] good here [Mewar] as in all Rajputana, each thakur is independent and rules his state, administering the laws as though he were king." ³³

Despite such fragmentation and diffusion, two factors enabled the system to integrate and function. The first was the interdependence of the network of sanad relationships forged originally throughout Rajputana by the East India Company. The second (which also buttressed the first) was the meticulous maintenance of kinship ties. Although Rajputs as a whole were endogamous, each gotra was patrilineally exogamous. Thus, a widespread familial and marriage network which extended throughout Rajputana and Kutch served to integrate Rajputs, be they rulers or subjects, on a supra-local basis.

Rajputs in Mewar constituted but 10% of the population. State and external treaty apparatus, as well as claims on kinship, could be invoked if their authority was threatened.³⁴ Authority at grass roots could be equally as important. On the one hand, thakurs' rule could degenerate into self-indulgence and untrammelled oppression. On the other, it could be as benevolent to village communities as it could be autocratic.³⁵

In the case of excesses, the maharana had the power to confiscate thikanas and banish thakurs. In the case of an heir succeeding to a thikana while still in his minority, an administrator could be appointed until such time as the inheritor came of age and it should be noted that administrative abuses were usually most frequent in villages where the local ruler was in his minority.

A reference too must be made of the judicial institutions which were an integral part of Mewar's governance. Judicial powers of the

thakurs had been defined more formally in 1865. These new definitions also extended to hakims who exercised executive and magisterial powers in khalsa villages. To prevent despotic practices among thakurs and corrupt ones among hakims, a court of civil and criminal appeal, ijlas khas, was constituted in 1877 and comprised qualified jurists as well as members of the nobility and the maharana. This court was reconstituted in 1880 as the mahendraj-sahba. Hakims, in dealing with criminal cases, could impose a fine up to Rs500 and imprison an offender for up to a year. Civil cases up to Rs5,000 could also be heard. It should be noted that a hakim was invariably selected from the mahajan caste and the appointment was invariably a hereditary one.³⁶

Mewar's 17 hakims and 35 subordinate naib-hakims adjudicated on cases in khalsa areas until judicial reforms of the late 1930s abolished them. Not until 1942 were thakurs' powers reduced further defined and moderated by permanently appointed qualified judicial officers.³⁷

PRE-MUTINY ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

From the period of Tod's influence until 1827, Bhilwara, Pur and Sanganer remained "reserved" pargana. Under adroit management of East India Company officials, it was not surprising that Mewar's "reserved" parganas ranked among its richest.³⁸

In 1827, the company relinquished the pargana at Bhilwara to the durbar but, within one year, mismanagement and misgovernment led to economic deterioration so extensive that Bhilwara was again deserted. The position worsened further in 1830 when the company's agency at Udaipur closed and Mewar's political affairs were placed

under the aegis of Ajmer. Two decades lapsed before the company intervened and again obtained reservation of the same pargana. To redeem arrears in payment of tribute and to alleviate the economic chaos into which Mewar had fallen, the company advanced to the darbar a loan (of which the company was also guarantor). The revenue of the reservations were appropriated therefore not only for tribute, as had previously obtained, but also for amortisation of state debt.³⁹

Bhilwara suffered a further setback with the Mutiny. The British garrison at Nimuch, south of Chittorgarh, fell to the mutineers. The garrison at Nasirabad on the Ajmer-Merwara border fell and that of neighbouring Kota followed. Save a skirmish between British troops and rebel Tantia Topi at Sanganer, Bhilwara remained untouched by battle.⁴⁰ However, a decade earlier, the British, under Sir Henry Lawrence, AGG at Ajmer, had raised a Bhil militia at the Ajmer-Merwara border to restrain the incursion of marauding tribes of Bhil and Mina outlaws. In the wake of the Mutiny, tribal plunderers and looters terrorised the entire plain to an extent where Bhilwara's inhabitants yet again fled.⁴¹

POST-MUTINY ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

Between 1858 and World War I, economic and social change which occurred in Mewar was extremely limited and precipitated by two main factors, namely, social reforms imposed by the British and the arrival of railway communication.

In country where a quarter of local cash revenues, chauth, had long exacted by Marattas, Pindaris, and tribal outlaws and where

capital existed largely only as non-transferable hereditary landrights, neither coined money nor exchange in kind was particularly durable as security. Land, being more secure than chattel, was the preferred form of payment of services rendered to the ruler or any of his vassals but was more difficult to obtain. It is therefore not surprising debtors should have to have bonded themselves to their creditors in order to liquidate their debts or taxes. Bonded labour and begar was practised by most social categories of Mewaris and its enforcement was by no means exclusive to either an autocratic ruler, a despotic noble, or to an avaricious mahajan. Insolvency also frequently led to traffic in children. The Nath caste of sadhus for instance replenished its numbers entirely through trade in children.^{4 2}

It is known that, in the erstwhile Jaipur State, untouchables were most frequently the victims of regimes of begar intermittently practised there. There are suggestions that victims of begar in Mewar did not include "twice born" castes but begar could be imposed either on members of castes such as Jat, gadari and kir or on tribals. (Untouchables, for some reason, appear to have been "begar-exempted".)^{4 3}

It should also be remembered that the daroga caste was one of slavery. Darogas were the offspring of Rajputs and their concubines who were kept as domestic servants either in the thikana fortresses or in the maharana's palace and were regarded virtually as chattel property. (Even today, a Rajput family may symbolically "give" darogas as part of a wedding present.)

Sati by maharanis had been discontinued at the Mewar court since the 1840s but was prevalent in the thikanas. In fact, at court,

a daroga woman from the palace zenana was usually induced to act in the maharani's stead at a sati commital. Female infanticide was a practice for which Rajputs were notorious and an expedient used to obviate the cost of expensive marriages in later life.⁴⁴

Consistent with humanitarian policy which had been pursued in British India since the passage of the Charter Act of 1833, the British political resident in Udaipur, by proclamation of the maharana made in 1863, procured for Mewar the suppression of sati, of trade in children, of begar, and of female infanticide. The previous economic importance of these practices can be judged by the fact that, within a year, the impact of abolition of these customs prompted Mewar's seths and mahajans to hold a week-long protest hartal of 3,000 persons strong. Ostensibly, the specific cause of grievance had been the abolition of an, a local legal procedure by which invocation of the maharana's name could block litigation in a dispute. The procedure had been so abused by Mewar's wealthier mercantile community, legal redress was effectively denied to those in most need of it.⁴⁵

An was restored but, possibly as a means of diffusing the power accruing to urban mercantilist communities throughout Rajputana besides removing another obstacle to the inroad of western civilisation, artisans and merchants native to the Rajput states were formally emancipated. In effect, this meant that traders, usurers, craftsmen, etc. were at liberty to migrate within Rajputana and throughout the Indian sub-continent.⁴⁶

The Bhils and Minas were also affected by administrative change. The institution of a state police deprived them of balawa which they

had levied on travellers for safe conduct. More vigorous collection of customs on borders, monopolisation of distillation, and administration of Mewar's first systematic census collection undermined the economic buoyancy, albeit one of largely illicit origin, on which the tribals had come to depend.⁴⁷

Sir John Lawrence, while AGG at Ajmer, had made particular note of the callous animosity with which the Mewari nobility treated the Bhils. Lawrence had been eager to raise a border Bhil militia as much as a means of reforming the pillagers as well as keeping the peace.⁴⁸

With the progressive intrusion of Pax Britannica, the Bhils' frontier had been forced more and more into the mountainous Aravallis. The intrusion of census officials sparked an uprising which embraced tribals the length and breadth of the state and which, under British military direction, was effectively contained.

The appointment of (later Sir) Ronald Wingate, ICS, as Mewar's revenue settlement officer for the purpose of improving revenue administration resulted in a regular survey of khalsa lands and measures to prevent deforestation of wastelands. The Jat cultivators saw enclosure of forest as a deprivation of part of their hereditary patrimony and, in 1880, placed an embargo on ploughing. In adopting such extreme action, the Jats were secretly encouraged by zila officials and other commercial interests for whom the proposed revenue reforms would have deprived sources of illegal perquisites. The cultivators' agitation was formidable enough and the consequences for future food supplies dire enough to force the abandonment of the proposal until 1893.⁴⁹

Immediately after the Mutiny, the Government of India initiated the construction of a road (now part of Rajasthan State Highway No.8) through Bhilwara to connect the garrison towns of Nasirabad in the north with Nimuch in the south. The Mewar durbar met 66% of the cost of construction and the Government of India was responsible for upkeep. The utility of the road was superceded by the construction of a metre-gauge Ajmer-Kandwa railway which also travelled through Bhilwara in parallel with the road and linked Rajputana with Malwa.⁵⁰

This railway line opened in 1881. It was operated by the Government of India until 1884 when it was taken over by the Bombay Baroda and Central India (BB & CI) Railway Company which continued to operate the line until 1905. During the 1870s, the Government of India was authorised to raise loans for productive capital works, which could include railway construction. In 1880, the Government's Famine Report recommended that construction of additional railway lines be given urgent priority but, to expedite this construction against a falling rupee value, the Government invariably had to fall back onto the pre-1880s policy of "guaranteeing" necessary capital finance. Under the "guarantee" system, the Government of India guaranteed resumption, supply of materials, supply of technology, and a 5% annual dividend payable over a 25 year minimum period during which the railway's operations were leased to the concern that provided the capital.⁵¹

Cost of construction of Indian railways averaged £18,000 per mile in 1868, a figure which compared extraordinarily favourably with that of £62,000 per mile in Britain. However, as an economic expediency of the 1880s, metre gauge was preferred to broad gauge

which meant that the entire subcontinent was saddled with two incompatible rail systems. Delays in transport and pilferage of merchandise occurred at points where the two systems interconnected. It is essential to note that almost all of the private capital spent on Indian railways was raised in Britain and two fifths of that was actually spent in Britain (even on coal and sleepers!). The lines were managed and operated by Britishers as well.⁵²

In 1896, a branch line from Chittorgarh to Udaipur was built to Mewar's capital with the Ajmer- Kandwa line. The branch line was built under the supervision of the Mewar State Engineer and operated profitably by the state using BB & CI locomotives and rolling stock.

Mewar's first "non-domestic" industrial initiative occurred in 1880 when the durbar itself established a cotton gin at Bhilwara. The advent of the railway line would normally have enabled shipment of unspun cotton produced on the local pargana to Bombay thereby enhancing khalsa cash revenues and also taking advantage of the abolition of cotton duties which was instituted in 1879 but the venture was short-lived.⁵³

In British-administered Ajmer-Mewara, a gin was established at Beawar in 1885 and fitted with superior machinery. The inability of the Bhilwara gin to compete with its northern neighbour led inevitably to operating losses and the sale of the gin to Bombay interests in 1887. The durbar bought back the gin in 1900 as a means of providing famine relief and added a press. Within four years, it ceased to operate profitably, its production had dropped by 80%, and the gin was again disposed of.⁵⁴

Originally, the 1879 abolition of Indian cotton duties had occurred as part of a prevailing ideological adherence (and one shared by British India's political masters) to a free-trade philosophy and also at the insistence of Lancashire cotton mill interests which exported to India. A currency crisis of 1894 necessitated the generation of revenue through higher customs tariffs. Although cotton duties were then increased to 5%, Lancashire pressed for a countervailing exercise of the same percentage. (Tariff discrimination in favour of foreign imports, especially English manufactured textiles, lost some momentum during World War I but the influence of the Lancashire lobby did not positively wane until 1921. Not until protection of Indian cotton manufacturers was well and truly entrenched in the inter-war years was Mewar permitted to impose its own customs on imported spun cotton and manufactures from British India.)⁵⁵

The introduction of rail led also to the flooding of Mewar's markets with cheap imported goods and food grains (in fact, the cost of foodstuffs dropped to an all-time low as soon as the Ajmer-Kandwa railway opened). It led also to the extension of the Government of India's monopolies on salt and opium. Coupled with imperial free trade policy, the introduction of a railway through Mewar simultaneously administered the coup de grace to local handicraft manufacture just as the introduction of railways had done elsewhere in India.

The extension of the salt monopoly of the Government of India came in the form of an "equalisation" arrangement whereby the Mewar Durbar was compensated for the imposition of duties on salt imported to the state. However, the process of equalisation did not provide for subsequent reinstatement of the livelihood of Mewari salt manufacturers

whose production was forcibly ended.

A particularly significant influence of Mewar's fortunes occurred in this period and came in the form of a natural disaster. In 1896-99 Rajputana was afflicted by drought, famine, and a consequential epidemic of cholera. The combined impact was so devastating (in Mewar alone) that a third of its population was razed. So profound was this impact that it took another two decades for even Bhilwara to replenish its population.

The 1896-99 famine has often been described by historians as a "famine of work" rather than of food and this was certainly the case in Bhilwara. The railway could supply rations to inhabitants of Mewar's plains but, in the absence of serviceable roads (as well as bullocks) combined with an inefficient durbar administration, the Government of India's Famine Code was rendered largely unworkable in Mewar. What was achieved during this period was the completion of the Udaipur branch railway line and reinforcement of main line embankments as famine relief projects. At the same time, the Bhilwara cotton gin operated at its most productive level and serious attention was at last given to Mewar's irrigation.⁵⁶

It was in the course of famine relief operations that Bhilwara obtained its imperial post office but, what was technically and administratively even more progressive, was the installation of a telegraph line between Bhilwara and, via Lambia, Pipli, a village on the Shahpura border and headquarters of relief administration on Mewar's north eastern hilly tracts. (As an illustration of the kind of autonomy which a high standing foujdar or sardar of Mewar could exercise, even in a time of food crisis, the Raja of Banera, whose

estate divided the Shahpura Chiefship from its nearest railway station, Lambia, imposed a four anna cess on every cartload of relief food-grain which was transported from Lambia siding to Shahpura. Within 12 months the raja netted Rs1,200 from the impost!)⁵⁷

A survey of irrigation potential was made in 1905 by Wingate and a military engineer from Jaipur, Major-General Sir Swinton Jacob. The survey recommended, among other things, the construction of two new bunds, both close by Bhilwara, one being at Meja on the Kothari River and a second at Kotri, again on the Kothari River. Ostensibly, because of prohibitive cost estimates, the reigning maharana dismissed the recommendations (and, as already pointed out, construction did not eventuate until after Independence).⁵⁸

MAHARANA FATEH SINGH

Fateh Singh was elected to the gadi of Mewar by the sardars in 1884, his predecessor having died without legitimate male issue or having adopted an heir. He was a Ranawat Sisodia who succeeded in his early majority. "Conservative" and "reactionary" are terms usually applied to him by historians. While, as Viceroy, Lord Curzon described Fateh Singh as "honourable and estimable ... as a man ... but ... as a ruler ... obstinate and stupid",⁵⁹ Fateh Singh's illiteracy and restricted upbringing no doubt impeded his administrative efficiency but, in retrospect, in his proceedings with Political Department officials, Fateh Singh manifested a certain shrewdness.

In his personal conduct, Fateh Singh was beyond reproach. He was not oppressive as a ruler. His accounts were never up-to-date but Mewar, throughout his reign, was never in debt.⁶⁰ Moreover, Fateh

Singh was sensitive to the peculiar balance of power which existed between the crown and its vassals so he therefore sought to establish cordial relations between his thakurs and himself and was the first ruler in modern times to have effectively brought the majority of his nobility under control. His resistance to modernisation of any description appeared prompted as much by distrust of the interests of British government officials as by a desire to restore Mewar to an idealised past glory.

So successful was Fateh Singh's rebuttal of British inference in Mewar's internal affairs that Lord Minto's laissez-faire policy towards the native states was almost outmoded at the time of its promulgation in 1910.⁶¹ As the price of the construction of the Chittorgarh-Udaipur branch railway, Fateh Singh insisted on the dismissal of his diwan, Mehta Panna Lal (the leader of Udaipur's mahajan community), whom he suspected of being an agent of the political resident, and Fateh Singh assumed the reins of administration himself.⁶²

During the remainder of Fateh Singh's reign, the mileage of metalled road in Mewar was actually allowed to decrease. Initiatives in public education wained after the darbar assumed the functions of an earlier Mewar State Education Committee.

The mahendraj-sabha almost ceased to function under Fateh Singh's rule. The court comprised 17 members, including its secretary, who were selected from among qualified jurists and the sardars. The maharana was ex officio the court's president. An ijlas mamuli of eight members could imprison criminal offenders up to seven years, impose criminal fines of up to Rs5,000 and order two

dozen stripes. In civil cases, the eight members could decide on complaints involving up to Rs15,000.

An ijlas kamil over which the maharana presided, was supreme in criminal, civil and appellate cases. Decisions determined by the ijlas mamuli were enforceable only when confirmed by the maharana. Cases before the ijlas kamil could proceed only in the maharana's presence.⁶³

That this judicial apparatus was inspired by advice from the British political resident was a fact which Fateh Singh found distasteful. The legalism of judicial procedures he also found unfathomable. Decisions of the ijlas mamuli lay unconfirmed, cases before the ijlas kamil were either unheard or heard before the maharana privately, other cases eligible to be heard by either khas were not filed and, thus, the mahendraj-sabha lapsed into dormancy. Fateh Singh's domestic "laissez-faire" policy (or the diplomacy of non-interference with the thikanas) meant that eligible appellants or plaintiffs from the estates were either discouraged or prevented by the thakurs from proceeding to Udaipur.⁶⁴

The manager of the Mewar State Railway, though British, was inefficient but, because he enjoyed the Maharana's personal trust, Fateh Singh defied pressure from the residency to have the manager removed. While relations between the palace and the residency were invariably tense, Fateh Singh was on most familiar and friendly terms with a United Free Church of Scotland medical missionary whom, in spite of hostility from the sardars, Fateh Singh had permitted to open a public dispensary and establish a church.⁶⁵ On the issue of the proposed Meja and Kotri bunds close by Bhilwara, Fateh Singh

permitted the setting-up of an irrigation department but withheld consent to the construction of the dams.⁶⁶

During World War I, Fateh Singh gave the British war effort cash assistance but, unlike neighbouring Rajput rulers, the Maharajas of Bikaner, Jaipur and Jodhpur, who provided troops, arms, equipment and cash, he would commit neither soldiers nor arms. Mica was sought by the British as a material to be used in production of military and defence equipment. The mineral was already mined in the Shahpura chiefship but, since much of Bhilwara mica tends to be "stained", it is understandable that the British would wish to explore nearby deposits in Mewar State for the possibility of extracting mica of superior quality. Fateh Singh would agree to exploration and exploitation only if the controlling interests were Indian. As Indian capital needed to launch such a venture on a commercially profitable scale was not forthcoming and as superior mica was already mined in abundant quantities in Bihar, no mica mining on the Mewar side of Bhilwara transpired.⁶⁷

How did Fateh Singh manage to withstand British intervention in his rule when any other native ruler who acted with such aloof aplomb would possibly have been removed earlier? One obvious reason was the maharana's symbolic role in consolidating Rajput (and indirectly British) hegemony within the State of Mewar and throughout the treaty Rajput states.

Another obvious reason was the promulgation of the Vice-Royal policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the native states (or laissez-faire as the name by which the policy also became known). In combination with progressive Indianisation, by the Government of India, of Imperial Councils, the policy's announcement was a prelude

to the recognisable "dyarchy" of governance which evolved in the 1920s. The laissez-faire policy was first stated in 1909 in a speech given by the Viceroy, Lord Minto at, significantly, Udaipur. The tenets of the policy were:

... our policy is with rare exceptions one of non-interference in the internal affairs of Native States ... The foundation stone of the whole system is the recognition of identity of interests between the Imperial Government and the Durbars and the minimum of interference with the latter in their own affairs. I have always been opposed to anything like pressure on Durbars with a view to introducing British methods of administration. I have preferred that reforms should emanate from Durbars themselves and grow up in harmony with the traditions of the State. It is easy to overestimate the value of administrative efficiency. It is not the only object to aim at, though the encouragement of it must be attractive to keen and able Political Officers ... though abuses and corruption must, of course, as far as possible be corrected, I cannot but think that Political Officers will do wisely to accept the general system of administration to which the Chief and his people have been accustomed. The methods sanctioned by tradition in States are usually well adapted to the needs and relations of the ruler and his people. The loyalty of the latter to the former is generally a personal loyalty which administrative efficiency, if carried out on lines unsuited to local conditions, would lessen or impair ... ⁶⁸

A third, less obvious but nevertheless intensely important, additional reason which enabled Fateh Singh to sustain his aloofness towards British advisers concerned the succession. Before reaching the age of 12, Fateh Singh's sole male issue and heir apparent, Maharaj Kanwad Bhopal Singh contracted polio. Bhopal Singh's recovery was protracted and there were serious fears that he would not survive the attack. The heir's consequential paraplegia precluded any thoughts of his entry to Mayo College at Ajmer, the college for Rajput princes which Lord Mayo had established on European educational

lines in 1873. Fateh Singh's possessive and protective attitude toward the custody of his son, together with his inevitable suspicion of British officialdom also precluded the appointment of a British approved personal governor to Bhopal Singh. Hence, ambitions which the British Political Department had held that the progress of Mewar's modernisation might hasten under the administration of a ruler of western schooling were dashed.

The problem confronting the Indian Political Service, and indeed Lord Curzon himself, was the prospect of the heir not outliving his father and the consequent inevitability that the sardars of Mewar would elect a ruler as obstinate as Fateh Singh.⁶⁹ However, not only did Bhopal Singh survive but he lived to succeed his father as regent in 1922, two crises by then having arisen which were of sufficient magnitude for the British to enforce Fateh Singh's abdication.

The first crisis arose at the close of World War I. The cost of military expenditure on a frontier war with the Afghans as well as incursions into Mesopotamia and the Caspian had taxed the Government of India's exchequer almost to the limit. World trade had entered recession and Indian bonds in London were unpopular. These circumstances collectively presented the Government of India with a crisis which worsened with the collapse of the exchange value of the imperial rupee.

The Mewari rupee contained more silver than the imperial rupee and, for this reason, Fateh Singh was completely unaccommodating when requested to devalue the Mewari rupee in proportion to the devaluation of the imperial rupee. Commercially, the consequences

were serious and exacerbated by the oversight of the darbar to keep sufficient stock of its own currency on the market. Hording, satta, and manipulation of currency exchange by the mahajans to their own advancement was rife. A decree proscribing satta was issued but served only as a palliative and eventually realities compelled Fateh Singh to devalue.⁷⁰

The second crisis was the culmination of a series of rural and agrarian uprisings which started in 1916. A bania of Udaipur, Motilal Tejawat, a spice seller, had acquired an influence over Bhil tribes-people which occupied Mewar's southern border tracts. The Bhils had become discontented about discrepancies in the revenue rates adopted in different Rajput states which shared common borders in this region. With the aim of achieving a uniform rate over the whole Bhil belt of Rajputana and Gujarat, Motilal Tejawat led a revolt in January 1922, which was millennial in inspiration and violent in action. Preferring to appease the tribals' grievances by negotiation in the first instance, Fateh Singh resisted pressure to mobilise the Mewar Bhil Corps (the state regiment of tribals raised in 1849 at the behest of Lawrence and officered by Britishers) to suppress the revolt. Fateh Singh's hesitation cost him the surrender of his ruling powers, if not his gadi. The Bhil Corps was mobilised, the revolt was crushed, the Bhils were pacified, and Tejawat was gaoled.⁷¹

The Political Resident had reported to the AGG, Rajputana, "Mewar is becoming a hotbed of lawlessness".⁷² However, it was not just the lawlessness which was of prime concern. The significance was political and derived from the fact that the unrest was led by professed Indian nationalists. The one exceptional case

was the 1922 Bhil uprising in which Motilal Tejawat falsely claimed, as part of his millennial propaganda, that the revolt was part of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, than at its height in British India.⁷³ The critical aspect of this success of events was that it had occurred in the most backward parts of Rajputana's most backward state! The portents were ominous.

MEWAR'S REVENUE SYSTEM ⁷⁴

Apart from a very small and uncertain mercantile trade and monetary and chattel transactions incidental to matrimonial contracts and inheritance, the state fiscal system was by far the dominant apparatus for generating finance. Because the official revenue apparatus was structurally interwoven with Mewar's political apparatus, revenue policy also influenced Bhilwara's historical development. This influence occurred in two ways. First, the protracted transition from exacting revenue in kind to revenue in cash and the constraints on this transition imposed by Mewar's traditional sociopolitical structure. Secondly, change to the revenue system was invariably the catalyst which precipitated popular political unrest.

At the time of Tod's arrival in Mewar, agricultural revenue was obtained either by batai (in which case a seer a piece was deducted from cultivated grain produce for allocation, as indicated earlier, to village officials such as the purohit, nayak, patwari, chamar and patel), or by kankut in which case a division was made of a conjectural estimate of the crop on the ground.

Rarely was revenue paid in anything but kind and the method of assessment could vary not only from village to village but from

caste to caste. In simple round figures, the cultivator surrendered approximately a quarter to a half of his grain produce either to a hakim (in the case of a khalsa village) or to a thakur (in the case of a thikana).

Cash tax was levied bighari (on a rate per unit area) on cash crops (kharif and rabi) such as sugarcane, cotton, opium, hemp and tobacco. With the progressive consolidation of revenue settlement under the direction of British officials, the tax on commercial crops not only had to be paid in cash but in imperial currency. A feudal tax, called barar had to be paid when a tenant's daughter was married. Cesses on ploughs and hutments were also common.

The institution of a regular revenue settlement for khalsa land which was organised along modern lines was undertaken by Wingate. It was completed in 1884 for introduction in 1885 and was to operate for 20 years. As part of the settlement, Bhilwara was raised from pargana to the status of zila. The system of settlement fixed by Wingate bore strong similarities to the ryotwari revenue system which the East India Company had introduced in its Madras Presidency on the recommendation of James Mill. The distinguishing features of this system were, first, the fact that it imposed levies directly on the individual cultivator and, secondly, the fact that the rate of assessment represented a "fine-tune" between the irrigable, cultivable and productive capacities of the cultivator's holding and the need to ensure an adequate return on labour and capital invested in the cultivation.

Prior to his appointment as diwan, Mehta Panna Lal had sought imposition of cash rates and the discontinuation of crop division but heavy rains which destroyed the crop of 1875 made the imposition

impractical. Wingate's system was resisted for almost eight years. Not until rates were substantially lowered in 1893 was the system accepted and it seemed that the assessments were met without difficulty.

The rates set by Wingate were:

Table 2 Assessment in Rupees and Annas per Acre (Year - 1893)

Class of Soil	Irrigated		Irrigated Rabi		Unirrigated		Unirrigated Rabi	
	Rs	A	Rs	A	Rs	A	Rs	A
Kali	15	0	3	0	6	0		6
Bhuni	12	0	1		4	8		3
Retri	9	0		9		15		1½
Rati	7	0		14		4		0½

Source: Erskine, K.D., Rajputana Gazetter, Mewar Residency, IIA, 1908, p.73.

On a thikana the thakur paid an annual quit rent, chhatund, of one-sixth of the thikana's income. Nazarana, a cash gift, was payable on the accession of a new maharana. A fee called kaid was payable on a thakur's succession.

Besides thikana and khalsa there were two other kinds of tenure, viz. sasan which was granted to Brahmins and bhum whose occupants, bhumias, paid a nominal quit-rent and performed certain public services such as guarding public highways, escorting the public treasury, and watch and ward. Collection of revenue was the responsibility of the hakims and naib hakims who usually belonged to the bania or mahajan caste communities.

This system of revenue generation and collection remained unchanged until 1922 when Chenevix Trench's appointment as Revenue Settlement Officer resulted in a liberalisation of the bapota or patrimonial

tradition of land tenure. Under bapota, be that the right to the soil for cultivation or right to tax the produce of cultivation, the patrimony was inalienable. Trench's 1922 settlement of khalsa continued the recognition of katedar which, subject to payment of dues, guaranteed permanent occupancy and inheritability but proscribed transferability of ownership save, in some instances, mortgage. Three new tenures introduced by Trench were:

Bapi which, again subject to payment of dues, guaranteed permanent occupancy, inheritability and transfer of ownership by sale, mortgage or gift,

Mustakil-Shimki, which guaranteed permanent occupancy in excess of 12 years but proscribed transferability, and

Shimki which enabled conversion of tenancy at will to either mustakil-shimki or bapi by payment of nazarana.

Two other important features of the settlement was its eventual extension (at least partially) to thikana and the addition of irrigation to the assessment formula.

PEASANT SATYAGRAHAS

At the time of Trench's settlement of 1922, approximately 40% of villages in the area which now constitutes Bhilwara District was khalsa.⁷⁵ The remainder was thikana and 83 villages of this remainder comprised the estate of the Rao of Bijolia (a sardar of the Mewar). This particular thikana dated from 1509 CE, lay 55 miles east of Bhilwara, and was sprawled over 100 square miles.⁷⁶ The road from Bhilwara was at times impassable and so isolated was the thikana that not until 1917 was even a bicycle seen there.⁷⁷

The rao, his kinsmen, and other Rajputs comprised collectively but five per cent of the total population which was 7,637 approximately. The bulk of the cultivators of the thikana was of Dhakar caste who had come originally from the neighbouring states of Bundi, Kota and Gwalior. As the soils of Bijolia were the least productive of the Bhilwara region, the tribute payable to the rao (which was, as in the case of khalsa, usually a quarter to a half) was a heavy burden for the kisan cultivators. As early as 1897, the kisans of Bijolia, having gathered at Girharpa for the obsequies of a deceased jati member, took the drastic step of appointing a deputation of two patels to appeal the maharana against the levies of the rao. The rao retaliated by expelling the two patels.⁷⁸

Following an inquiry into the kisans' grievances, Maharana Fateh Singh abolished some levies and issued a formal warning to the rao. However, in the bleak famine of 1899, the rao was able to reassert his authority by building a dam and distributing free rations to the distressed, thereby undermining the unity fostered by the Dhakars.

When the famine broke in 1901 the rao imposed a new cess of Rs5 payable on the marriage of a cultivator's daughter. In protest, the kisans stopped marrying their daughters and, in 1905, took their daughters en masse to the rao demanding the cess' abolition. The rao yielded to the kisans' demands but died the following year.

The heir, on succession, imposed a new cess in order to pay his kaid to the maharana. The kisans objected and threatened to boycott the cultivation of Bijolia lands. They subsequently took lands on lease in Bundi and Gwalior states as well as in khalsa parts of Mewar. The thikana authorities retaliated and the leadership was

expelled from Mewar altogether. The incident was nevertheless reported by the popular vernacular press in Kanpur, Allahabad, Calcutta and Pune.

The kisans' organisation, determination and cohesion was so outstanding that, as a political stratagem, it served as a model for the successful satyagraha which Gandhi organised as Champaran, Bihar, in 1917. As one of the leaders, Haribhau Upadhyay exclaimed:

It was the first successful mass satyagraha in the Indian states wherein the peasants displayed considerable heroism, patience and self-suffering.⁷⁹

Prithvi Singh, the Rao of Bigolia who had crushed the 1906 satyagraha, died in 1916. As his heir, Keshri Singh, was a minor, the durbar appointed a guardian whose sympathies, as it turned out, lay with the kisans. The guardian therefore requested one of the former leaders, a sadhu called Sita Ram Das, to invite a nationalist revolutionary from the United Provinces in British India, Bhoop Singh, to visit the estate. Bhoop Singh was wanted by the imperial police and he had taken refuge in Mewar under the alias of Vijay Singh Pathik. The guardian was encouraged in his request by a thikana official, Manikya Lal Verma.

Under Pathik's leadership a panchayat board, with Sita Ram Das as its president, was elected by an assembly of 1,000 kisans. With the aid of volunteers, the panchayat operated an administration in parallel with that of the thikana. Upadhyay recorded that Bijolia "is the only place in Rajasthan where kisan panchayats on organised lines have been brought into existence".⁸⁰

The movement in Bijolia involved some 5,000 cultivators, mostly Dhakars, who also won the support of untouchables and members of similarly depressed castes. In enforcing discipline and cohesion, the kisans were advantaged by the peculiar aspect of the jati system, chokala, which, in essence, was the geographical "spread" of jati members. Chokala was and continues to be the zone of jati endogamy and the area over which a jati panchayat or samiti had control over its members. Whereas the "chokala" of the Rajputs was supra-local, that of the Dhakars was intensely local.

Under the educated and tightly controlled leadership of Pathik and Verma, the satyagraha was kept peaceful. The chokala network which extended to jati members of the neighbouring states also assisted in sustaining the satyagraha.

An added impetus was the rapport which leaders of the satyagraha were able to establish with leaders of the Indian National Congress. Pathik and Verma attended the All-India Congress session of 1918 at Delhi, the session of 1919 at Amritsar, and the session of 1920 at Nagpur when useful contact was made with Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Gandhi. Indeed, at the Amritsar session, Tilak was so impressed with the success of the Bijolia satyagraha that he moved a resolution on the subject but the motion dropped following Malaviya's offer to intervene personally before Maharana Fateh Singh.

A political leader from Ajmer, Ram Narain Chowdhry, was another outside link. Chowdhry had initiated the formation of the Rajasthan Sevak Sangh and established its headquarters at Ajmer. The sangh's newspaper Tarun Rajasthan publicised activities at Bijolia. As only

one newspaper existed in Mewar (and as that was subject to severe censorship), publicity in Tarun Rajasthan was particularly useful to the cause of the satyagrahis.

REGENCY AND REIGN OF BHOPAL SINGH

Maharaj Kanwad Bhopal Singh was effective ruler from the time of his father's enforced abdication in 1922 until his father's decease in 1935 when Bhopal Singh himself ascended to the gadi of Mewar.⁸¹ Not until the advent of World War II however did any pronounced change occur in the state's administration which affected either Mewar as a whole or Bhilwara in particular.

Of some consequence was the kisans' satyagraha which had started at Bijolia prior to Bhopal Singh's regency continued unceasingly and, by the early '30s, the satyagraha had merged with the all-Indian civil disobedience movement. By agreement with the thikana of Bijolia in 1922, revenue settlement introduced by Trench required payment of rent in cash rather than in kind. In addition, annual rents were increased by 25% and darbar tribute by one anna per rupee. After excessive monsoon rains of 1922 had ruined the kharif crop, the kisans demanded remission of rents and taxes to compensate for the loss of harvest. They also pressed a Rs30 per annum education grant to be paid directly to the panchayat in accordance with the terms of an earlier agreement between the kisans and the thikana.⁸²

On Vijay Singh Pathik's advice, the kisans refused to cultivate their lands unless rents were adjusted to the lower scales which prevailed in neighbouring Kota. The lands concerned were 6,000 bighas of non-irrigated land (an area which represented 75% of Bijolia's

non-irrigated cultivable soils). The satyagrahis numbered 3,895 of which 3,840 were Dhakars.

With the prospect of nearly all of its non-irrigated farmland lying waste, the thikana retaliated by settling new tenants on the deserted lands. These new tenants were balais, members of a depressed leather-worker caste over whom Dhakars had long used as labourers, thikana officials, traders and usurers. Nevertheless, the kisans were not foiled and suspended payment of rents on their irrigated lands. The panchayat representative, Upadhyay, negotiated a peace with Trench in which the Bijolia thikana was first to atone for violations of earlier agreements, durbar tribute was to be embodied in rent, rent was to be reduced by one anna in the rupee, arrears in rent were to be remitted by half, and all lands previously occupied by the kisans were to be returned.

But the victory was only partial. The thikana was reluctant to evict its new tenants who had remained loyal to the administration. Moreover, the Balais and similar low-caste tenants were reluctant to relinquish their newly acquired lands. In response, the kisans served notice of possession on the new tenants and, on 21 April 1931, put plough to the lands. The police witnessed mass assault of the non-violent satyagrahis by the new tenants but it was 51 satyagrahis who were arrested. Transborder traffic was stopped by police and military patrols and thereby cut off aid from interstate to the satyagrahis. At Gandhi's behest, satyagraha at Bijolia was suspended and Jammalal Bajaj personally met Bhopal Singh who promised progressive restoration of the non-irrigable lands of the dispossessed kisans. Other demands of the kisans were met in time but restoration of

non-irrigated land never eventuated.

A rigorous administration of land revenue was one feature of Bhopal Singh's rule which contrasted with the rule of Fateh Singh. Education was another arena in which moderate improvement occurred. Before 1922, the Maharana High School was the only institution offering education beyond the primary standard. The high school's predecessor had been the Shamburatna Pathashala which was opened by Maharana Shambhu Singh in 1863.⁸³

At Bhilwara, a pathashala was opened by the durbar in 1872. The United Free Church of Scotland Mission opened a girls school at Bhilwara in 1884, the year of Fateh Singh's accession. In 1890, the Bhilwara durbar school was raised from primary to middle secondary standard and a primary school was opened at Pur.

In 1906, attendances at Bhilwara schools were as follows:⁸⁴

Table 3

Grade	Management	Pupils
Middle secondary	<u>durbar</u>	93
Lower primary (female)	United Free Church of Scotland Mission	15
Upper primary (Pur)	<u>durbar</u>	68

Source: Erskine, K.D., Rajputana Gazetteer, Mewar Residency, IIA, 1908, pp.22-23.

School supervision had initially been the responsibility of hakims but, between 1884 and 1894, supervision was in the hands of a special committee which reputedly discharged its responsibilities very effectively until its abolition by Fateh Singh.

At Udaipur, Bhopal Singh upgraded Maharana High School to the

level of intermediate college and, to impart Western education to the sons of Rajput nobility, he founded Bhopal Nobles School.

In 1930, the primary school at Sanganger was upgraded to middle secondary standard.

As stated earlier, modernisation and constitutional reform did not occur in Mewar until very belatedly in Bhopal Singh's rule. It was ironical that the policy embodied in Lord Minto's Udaipur Speech was waived in the case of the ruler of Udaipur himself. It was further ironical that, although Fateh Singh's abdication was induced on the grounds of his failing to reform Mewar's public administration, the administrative reforms immediately undertaken by his successor were hardly revolutionary. It is therefore appropriate that, at this juncture, reflection should be given to the reasons which contributed to these apparent anomalies and originated in the political and fiscal policies of the central Government of India.

First, in the interwar years the Government of India could maintain its position only by achieving a delicate balance between the demands of the British Empire and Indian domestic demands but the revenue available was insufficient to meet both sets of demands.⁸⁵ Two options could be used to solve the dilemma: one was to stimulate the Indian economy (and thereby increase India's capacity for taxation) and the second was to secure the support of India's politicians (and persuade them to moderate their demands). In the case of the first option grave difficulties prevented its implementation. One difficulty was pervading an ideological predilection for a "free market" model of economic development and the administrative and political policies which were incidental to the laissez faire approach. However, the

British Government's insistence that repayment of India's sterling debt should be met by India (and not, by default, the British taxpayer) in turn meant sustaining international confidence in the rupee, the Government of India sustaining a strictly balanced budget and, ultimately, the maintenance of India's "external" economy at the expense of its internal one. Simultaneously, it was recognised that India could not be ruled solely by market forces and that consequently the Raj had always depended on a measure of Indian acquiescence.

With regard to fiscal policy, India's involvement in World War I had necessitated expenditure on the part of the central government in excess of 65% of total appropriations. Even until the end of 1935, the military still absorbed over 40% of annual expenditure. The cost of servicing interest payments on loans raised during World War I was 10 times higher than it had been in pre-war years. Although the Government of India had sought to balance its books in post-war years by reducing military expenditure, the imperial view from London required that the Government of India sustain the needs of a sizable permanent military presence on the sub-continent.

The early post-war years were marked by a depression in the international trade of primary commodities which naturally affected adversely rates of exports from India. This factor, combined with increasing political insurgency, not to mention widely circulated press reports of agrarian uprisings such as those which had occurred in Mewar late in Fateh Singh's reign, were among a number which had led to the rupee crisis of the early '20s (which, in turn, had led to a crisis in the Mewari rupee and Fateh Singh's eventual abdication). A consequent suspicion of the power of the rupee among international

investors had made London borrowing difficult for the Government of India. The extension of the Indian National Congress' non-cooperation movement to the boycott of the purchase of British manufacturers led to a slump in imports of British textiles and consequently diminished Indian customs duties as a reliable source of substantial annual revenue.

Despite a desire on the part of British business concerns in India to see the rupee devalued in the early 1930s so as to advantage the competition of Indian goods on world export markets, the proposal was vetoed on two grounds. In the first place, such a concession could be seen as satisfying nationalist political opinion. In the second place, British Treasury and Indian Office officials set top priority on the Government of India remitting its London creditors and the British Government's "Home Charges" bill lest, as indicated earlier, the British taxpayer should have to meet India's sterling debts in the event of a default by the Government of India.

While India tariff rates were adjusted to compensate for the drop in manufactured imports and thereby attract sufficient dutiable imports to justify the continuation of customs as a principal source of revenue (a course of action vehemently opposed by the Lancashire mill owners' parliamentary lobby at Westminster), the central government placed levies on the revenues of provincial governments. Of provincial revenues, half was generated by land and two fifths from excise largely on commercial (either raw or processed) agricultural produce.

Tributes from the treaty states could constitute up to a tenth

of the public revenue available to the central government and, in turn, the princely revenues from which the tributes derived were overwhelmingly generated by land administration. (In fact, the income from tribute available to the Government of India exceeded even that of the salt monopoly.) Hence, comprehensive and efficient land administrations within the native states were the best guarantees of maintaining tribute as one reliable source of revenue income when other sources were under threat.

Kisan satyagrahas such as those which occurred at Bijolia and Begun occurred also in Gujarat. Those at Kheda and Barjoli were successful enough to cause the Governor of Bombay to lose a stone in weight from the administrative anxiety which the Kheda satyagraha alone had caused!⁸⁶ Clearly, had control of land administration collapsed, the consequence for the Raj's fiscal system would have been dire as would ultimately have been the political embarrassment of the British Government.

As stated earlier, the British domination required acquiescence to some extent on the part of Indian population. In the case of British India, economic austerity was offset by constitutional reform which enabled a measure of popular participation in government at the provincial level. In the case of the Rajput states, the position was reversed. The result of the Bijolia satyagraha in Mewar, for instance, was to align the maharana and the thakurs not just "diplomatically" but in real economic and political terms in a way which had been without precedent over the previous century. After all, the thakurs, the durbar and the maharana all had to gain from Trench's revenue settlements. Moreover, the entrenchment of the power of the ruler

and aristocracy reinforced by recent economic and political events as well as the fundamentally traditional political structure thwarted the expansion, economic and political, of the bania, mahajan and similar literate mercantile urban groups such as those which were leading the nationalist movement in British India.

In addition, the states were also integrated into a quasi-federal system which operated apart from British India and culminated in 1919 in the formation of the consultative Chamber of Princes.⁸⁷ In this way the Rajput states' consolidated alliance with the paramount power provided a buffer to counterbalance the inroads of Congress-led nationalism within British India towards swaraj. In fact, Delhi's proximity to Rajputana was among the reasons for its choice as the site of a new Indian capital (previously at Calcutta) in 1911. The defence of Delhi, it was thought, would be buffered by the adjacent collection of states individually ruled by a member of a loyal order of princes whose loyalty would even be further encouraged by convenient access to the viceroy. The Maharaja of Alwar claimed to speak on behalf of all his neighbouring rulers and expressed the Rajput princes' explicit endorsement of the proposed transfer.⁸⁸

The essential "terms of contract" implied in Minto's Udaipur Speech were really not so far-reaching provided that a state was "judiciously administered" (which in reality meant no more than suppression of flagrant despotism or corruption), the paramount power would not interfere in the state's internal affairs. The major practical advantage from the British friendship with the rulers was that, apart from Mewar, the Rajput princes had given very generously to the British effort in World War I.

Another factor which tended to retard modernisation in the states was the deterioration in the efficiency of the Indian Political Service, the cadre of the bureaucracy in British India which conducted diplomacy between the British Crown (through the viceroy) and the native rulers (and indeed with governments abroad). During the interwar years, service recruitment was in a critical need of overhaul and, in contrast with the inflated salaries Indian civil servants of the nineteenth century attracted, remuneration of the "politicals", save those of the top echelons, was appallingly low, a condition worsened by successive crises in the exchange value of the rupee.

Furthermore, "Indianisation" of the civil services which followed the passage of the Government of India Act, 1921, did not extend to the Indian Political Service (IPS). In comparison with what it had been before the onset of World War I, the administrative calibre of the IPS had wained.⁸⁹

There was one additional factor mitigating the intrusion of political nationalism of British India into the Rajput states which was not altogether unrelated to the intention of the Udaipur Speech. Even though a Provincial Congress Committee had been established at Ajmer with its own Hindi newspaper Tarun Rajasthan and while a number of inhabitants of Rajput states (including Mewar) were members of Congress and gave financially to the party's support and, furthermore, although eminent Congressmen, such as Bajaj, became, at various times, involved with the satyagraha politics of Bijolia and other parts of Mewar, organised popular political parties or praja mandals within the states did not emerge until the eve of World War II. The explanation of these circumstances is twofold. In the first place, it was deliberate states'

policy to outlaw political activities. (Bikaner was the only Rajput state to exercise some degree of toleration of political nationalism, an attitude which Maharaja Ganga Singh was personally responsible for fostering.) Secondly, and more significantly, until 1938 it was widely established Congress policy (and a policy influenced substantially by Gandhi himself) that, despite aspirations to the contrary, as the treaty states were in British law entities separate from British India there was no juridical basis which would justify Congress' interference in states' affairs.⁹⁰

PRE-INDEPENDENCE

Up to 1935, economic change in Mewar had been confined largely to reforms in the state fiscal system and improvements to local rail transport. Social change had been confined to modest reforms in the criminal code, education and justice administration. Change in the political structure had tended to be a reactionary one and resulted in the domination of the maharana over his thakurs, a contrast to the previously diffused balance of power which had existed between the crown and its vassals, this being a process which threat of democratisation posed by successive agrarian satygrahas had precipitated. Just as the Mewar state apparatus could seek to consolidate its position further by invoking the aid of the British paramount power as a treaty partner, the satygrahis too were dependent on outside assistance for their leadership.

Notwithstanding that the Rajasthan Sevak Sangh had dissolved in 1928, the India-wide civil disobedience movement had made a strong impression in Ajmer. The momentum of political nationalism in British

India failed to catch the attention of Mewar's urban communities until 1934 when the first attempt was made to found a Mewar Praja Mandal. The attempt was abortive on account of state suppression.⁹¹

Nevertheless, political agitation for constitutional reform in Mewar progressively heightened in the towns. Coupled with urban-based populist politics there emerged, as part of an officially developed policy, the embryo of capital intensive industry, the nucleus of which was situated at Bhilwara. Political developments eventually culminated in Mewar's accession to the Independent India in 1947 and the state's eventual absorption during the following year into the United States of Rajasthan, a constituent state of the new federal dominion.

On the political front, a legally recognised Rajya Praja Mandal was successfully founded at Udaipur in April 1938. Manikya Lal Verma, the former thikana official who had led the early Bijolia satyagrahas, was the new praja mandal's leader. In fact, all of the praja mandal's "high command" had been drawn from the leadership which had emerged during the Bijolia agitations. Within a week of its foundation, the praja mandal had enlisted 1,000 members who had, as their objective, the institution of responsible government by peaceful and legitimate means.⁹²

However, the praja mandal's political strategems also included threat of satyagraha, a threat to which the darbar acted repressively: the praja mandal was banned and Manikya Lal Verma was expelled from Mewar. In early October 1938, satyagraha began in Mewar's towns with a response by the population of a magnitude alarming to the darbar. A three-day hartal in the pilgrimage town of Nathdwara was followed by

a protest meeting of Brahmin women which, in turn, was dispersed by a lathi charge. Similar protests in Bhilwara resulted in 300 arrests.⁹³

The satyagraha was called-off by Gandhi in March 1939, and, to carry out constitutional reforms, Maharana Bhopal Singh appointed as his diwan the Mysorean politician, T. Vijaya Rajhavachariar.⁹⁴ In 1941, the ban on the Mewar praja mandal was lifted and a draft legislature bill was circulated for public discussion.⁹⁵ The draft was rejected by the praja mandal for failing to embrace total responsible government. The outbreak of the Quit India movement and protests in support of prisoners convicted as members of clandestine recruitment drives by agents of the outlawed Indian National Army led to breakdown of constitutional discussions and a reimposition of a ban on the praja mandal. Political agitation still continued in spite of official proscription, the immediate goal being the severance of treaty ties with British India. Five hundred arrests were made in 1942 alone.

In 1945, the ban on the praja mandal was lifted and elections were held for seats on the newly constituted municipal corporation of Udaipur. Out of 34 seats, 23 were won by the praja mandal which then began to agitate for the abolition of the thikana regime.⁹⁶ In February 1947, Maharana Bhopal Singh announced the appointment of a special committee to report on Mewar's constitutional problems and the Viceroy's Political Department even raised its Udaipur representative's status from "Resident" to "Agent" but, by the following August, events had passed out of the maharana's hands.⁹⁷

In reports which Manikya Lal Verma wrote from exile, it is evident from the names of detenus arrested during these agitations that urban leadership appeared to have sprung largely from Brahmin and mahajan

communities whose members were occupied either in the professions or merchant trade but it is important to note that, in Bhilwara, new organisations which emerged in 1940 included Harijan and Bhil Sevak Sanghs. The foundation of Bhilwara's Mahila Ashram by Manikya Lal Verma for the education and welfare of Hindu women, irrespective of caste, occurred in 1944.⁹⁸ Hence, one may conclude that political change which took place at the time of World War II also embraced the mobilisation of groups which historically had been socially disadvantaged viz. untouchables, tribespeople, and women.

In the sphere of economic development, the origin of modern industrialisation in Mewar, and Bhilwara in particular, can be traced to the immediate post-mutiny emancipation of Rajputana's artisanal and mercantile communities. A by-product of this action was the emigration of Jainist Marwari usurers and merchants from Rajputana to the commercial centres of British India, Calcutta being one.⁹⁹ The Marwari community has had a reputation legend for avowed commercial adroitness, piety, frugality, thrift and philanthropy. (Even in contemporary Indian business, Marwaris are rivals only to the Parsi and Sindi communities.)

A firm of Calcutta Marwaris, Duduwala and Co, was the first commercial enterprise to invest in Bhilwara. In 1934, Duduwalas were given leases to mine and export mica from Bhilwara and its environs. The leases had a currency of five years with royalty payments of 10% of sale value of mica extracted.¹⁰⁰

In 1937, less productive mines were sub-let to Bombay interests but, before these leases expired, they were transferred to two other

Marwari concerns, Seth Pasa Lal Mansinghka and the firm of Seth Rameshwar Lal Dedraja, Mewar Mineral Co. Mewar's second private commercial venture, Mewar Sugar Mills, began at Bhupalsagar, between Bhilwara and Udaipur.¹⁰¹

The third impetus for Mewar (and second for Bhilwara) was the foundation of MTM in 1938. It will be recalled that the establishment of a cotton mill at Beawar in Ajmer-Merwara in 1889 partly, if not substantially, led to the demise of the Bhilwara gin which the Mewar Durbar had founded shortly before. The Beawar mill, Krishna Mills Limited, was set up also by a Marwari promoter, Seth Darmodas Rathi. In turn, Rathi's enterprise in Beawar was followed by Edward Mills Limited in 1905, and a third mill in 1925. By that year, save Mewar, nearly every Rajput state possessed a cotton mill. The total value of the investment amounted to Rs 4 crore by 1940 when altogether 20 had been founded throughout Rajputana and Ajmer-Merwara. However, only 17 of these 20 mills were in active production in 1940 and throughout the 17, only 25% of spindles and looms were operative.¹⁰²

The promoters of MTM were two Marwaris from Beawar, Seth Champar Lal Swaroop and R.B. Seth whose interests were deliberately invited by the durbar which offered the enterprise:

- (i) a monopoly of cotton manufacture for the mills' first five years of operation;
- (ii) exemptions from payment of:
 - import tariffs,
 - land tax,
 - water tax,
 - octroi,
 - sales tax,

- for the mills' first 20 years of operation; and
- (iii) 150 bighas of land near the Bhilwara railway siding (Gandhinagar) at nominal nazarana.

For their part, the promoters were compelled:

- (i) to provide a workers' dispensary;
- (ii) to commence the mills' construction within six months of the agreement;
- (iii) to keep the mills operational;
- (iv) to provide their own water;
- (v) to pay an excise on manufactured cotton of 0.05 paise per ton; and
- (vi) instal 250 looms and 7,500 spindles.

The undertaking was incorporated as a joint stock company under the provisions of Indian companies legislation. Although the promoters honoured the requirements of the agreement with Mewar State, they became bankrupt in 1942. The mills' ownership and managing agency was transferred later in the year to Seth Sobagh Mal Lodha of Ajmer and production commenced shortly after the transfer.¹⁰³

In their European as well as Asian theatres, India was a main supplier of military stores for the British and their allies during World War II. The boycott of English manufactured textiles was solidly entrenched by the late 1930s. Labour in Mewar was neither organised nor entitled to a statutory wage and minimum conditions of work. Operation of factories was not subject to legislation either. In other words there were inducements additional to those provided by the durbar which would have made an investment such as MTM highly attractive as a profit-making prospect.

However, as events transpired, there were problems encountered in transporting quality coal to the mills for power generation. Machinery, for want of attention by a skilled maintenance staff, began to deteriorate and there was an unexpected problem of labour recruitment. In the absence of a local wage labour pool (unskilled as well as skilled), labourers for the mills had to be recruited in Beawar to the north, Malwa to the south, and as far afield as the United Provinces. As mentioned earlier, craftsmen's wages had always been higher in Mewar than elsewhere and it was unlikely remuneration from factory labour would have been an attractive economic alternative either to continued pursuit of handcrafts or to continued pursuit of agriculture. Indeed, among the attractions of investing in an industrial enterprise in a princely state were not only guaranteed monopolies and similar concessions but also the fact that trade union laws, factories and boilers laws, and payment of wages laws such as those which, in British India, guaranteed labour minimum protection against unscrupulous exploitation, yet had made no emergence in the princely states. Hence, no unions were organised to defend labourers' interests, occupational safety of labour could be largely ignored, and as a judicial system to which labourers' grievances could be referred was barely embryonic in formation, potential for judicial restraint of an employer's capricious actions hardly existed.

However, in 1947, labour laws of British India became enforceable in the former treaty states and necessitated inter alia provision of minimum wages, observation of minimum levels of occupational safety, and opportunity to refer disputes between employee to industrial arbitration. These innovations inevitably imposed constraints on the profitability not only of MTM but also of similar pre-Independence

industrial concerns in other princely states; so much so that they become so run down as to be incapable of generating the recapitalisation necessary to their long-term survival.

On the eve of Independence a Mill Mazdoor Sangh, a trade union of textile workers at MTM, which was affiliated with the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), was inaugurated.