THE Ganatantra Parishad seldom gets a good press. It is 'reactionary' or dominated by feudal interests and medieval traditions' or it is a party of 'disgruntled princelings'. Its rank and file are supposed to be illiterate tribals, hoodwinked by the Rajas, and incapable of realising that they are in the twentieth century and not knowing that there is a world of difference in democratic content between a vote given on the instructions of a local party boss and one given on the instructions of a Raja's henchman. In the words of the editor of the Economic Weekly (issue of May 3, 1958, p 592) the party which stands for ex-rulers conducted a "Mast ditch fight" in April and May 1958 (the period of the floorcrossings'), being moved into action by the prospect of their immense landed properties' being assessed and subjected to 'land laws applicable to others.' How long, the editor asks, can the Ganatantra 'sell its blatantly reactionary policies to the people?'

This, no doubt, is how the battle appeared from Bombay, through the smoke of Congress propaganda. From Orissa, where the air is clearer, it appeared that if anyone was lighting its last-ditch battle in 1958, it was the Congress, not the Ganatantra: and it was not the Ganatantra rampart that crumbled a year later.

In this article I shall describe the events in the ex-state areas after the merger in 1948. This, taken together with what I have already said about the division between the hill and the coast, will show that if the Ganatantra stands for ex-rulers it stands for other things as well. It is more than a party of 'disgruntled princelings' and if it were only that, it would not have grown successively stronger in the two elections since its formation eleven years ago. Secondly, I shall look for the 'blatantly reactionary policies' which, according to the Economic Weekly, the Ganatantra 'sells to the people' and try to balance this judgment against that of the Amrita Bazar Patrika, which on June 25th, 1959 described the Ganatantra as 'a party which believed sincerely in Parliamentary democracy and accepted the socio-economic programmes of the Congress'. (The Ganatantra, of course, is reactionary about prohibition, and it is possible that editorial opinion on the Economic Weekly is staunchly teetotal and that this is what is meant by "selling blatantly reactionary policies to the people.")

The Ex-States in 1948

India in 1948 was lighting a desperate struggle against anarchy. There was the crisis in Kashmir where there were refugee problems, there was the struggle over the Princely States. The Orissa Government had won its battle against the rulers of the Feudatory States and it took over the administration of these areas on January 1st 1948. The rulers were granted a privy purse based on the state's income, and an allowance to meet their religious obligations, and certain tax concessions. At the higher level of policy-making there is discernible a distinct effort to be conciliatory, or at least to avoid vindictiveness. But at the same time the climate of 1948 was not suited to gentle and subtle activities when the Government is engaged by a democratic Government at Hirakud and among the Adibasis of Bamera and Mayurbhanj. The Government of Orissa faced the attack and violence. It was at this time that the sanctity of life and property was lost, the Father of the Nation fell a victim to the mad orgy of hatred and violence. It was at this time that the Amrita Bazar Patrika lost their identity and merged in Orissa. The Rulers of these States who were dreaming dreams of sovereignty after the withdrawal of the British awoke from the helplessness which had led them to agree to the merger. Some of them misused the privileges guaranteed to them by the Government of India and like the traditional Bhasmasur attempted to use these privileges to weaken the Power that had granted them the same. The rulers were joined by self-seekers whose ambition could not be fulfilled with the assumption of power by the Congress. Many of those Congressmen who had outlived the patriotic fervour of the thirties and those whose political ambition had got the better of their good sense, cut themselves from the Congress as Socialists and Communists, to preach discontent and disaffection. Independence brought freedom of thought to a degree which never existed in the country before and this freedom was unscrupulously used for subversive activities. A weak administration would certainly have fallen a prey in Orissa to the forces of disorder and disturbance which raised their head in the first years of the present regime. The big plans of development which the Government launched upon at the very beginning of their regime afforded the Socialists, the Communists, and the feudal rulers an opportunity to launch their attacks against Government at Hirakud and among the Adibasis of Bamera and Mayurbhanj. The Government of Orissa faced the attack boldly and used the very force which had been so long used against themselves by the British to establish order in the State. For over a century the Police had been used by the British to suppress popular movements to keep the people in abject bondage. Now they served as guardians of peace, engaged by a democratic Government, so that revolutionary administrative changes and the bold development plans might proceed unhampered. Naturally both the Government and their agents were misrepresented and misjudged.

Towards the end of the year (1950) the activities of Honible Ranjit Singh Baria and other Honible Ministers, among the Adi-
basl population, contributed to a very great degree to easing the Adibasi situation by bringing about a broad outlook of unity among them. The foundation of the Nikhil Utkal Adibasi Congress was laid which in the succeeding year was to give the Jharkhand movement of Orissa a go-by. (Orissa 1950-51 Public Relations Department pp 4-5)"

Adibasi Risings
There were Adibasi risings in 1948 in Bamra, Gangpur, Bonal, and Pal-Lahara. These were put down by the Armed Police, some people were killed, others were detained, collective fines were imposed on villages. In Kharsawan there was a particularly unpleasant outbreak, resulting, according to the official enquiry, in 14 deaths, and according to an unofficial estimate, several hundred ("The 1948 Blood Bath in Kharsawan" by Rabi Ghosh, Mankind, Vol III. No 1 August 1948, pp 16).

There is a neat summary in Orissa 1949 (Public Relations Department) of the events of 1948 and 1949 and it shows how the political developments in the ex-states appeared to the Orissa Government.
"In Gangpur the Bihar Adibasi leaders had a hand. At about this time some Rulers started an agitation for a States' Union. Demonstrations were arranged in Kalahandi, Bolangir-Patna, Keonjhar, and Bamra, and extensive leafletting urging the masses to nullify the merger was indulged in. The centres of activity were shifted to Calcutta, Chaibassa and Monoharpur (Singbhumi) to avoid legal action by the Provincial Government. Adibasis in Keonjhar, Gangpur, Bonai, Bamra and Kalahandi were regularly contacted and incited to violence. In spite of the arrest and extermination of prominent agitators, the Royalists continued to excite the Adibasis of Bamra, who were worked up to demand an immediate transfer of power to them. Mob lawlessness broke out with the result that at Deogarh (Bamra) on 26th July firing had to be resorted to resulting in 3 dead and 13 injured. The situation was soon brought under control. The Union movement continued with the financial hacking of the Rulers, but in October 1948 the Rulers agreed to accept the merger and the movement died out.

"The next phase in the integrated States started with the Maharajas of Kalahandi and Bolangir-Patna aided by the Rajas of Gangpur, Sonepur, and Bamra sponsoring a new political organization called the 'Koshal-Utkal Praja Parishad', the members of which consisted chiefly of Prajamandal seceders and anti-merger agitators with headquarters at Bolangir (Patna). Branches of the Parishad were opened in Kalahandi. Sonepur, Gangpur, Bonai, Keonjhar, Athmallick, and Boudh and paid workers were busy propagating the party's ideals vilifying the Congress Government and Government employees, and canvassing support from the States people who were advised to vote for the Parishad candidates in the next general election.

"(1949) Following the merger of Mayurbhanj the leaders of the Adibasi Mahasabha and the anti-mergerista incited the Adibasis to widespread lawlessness and defiance of law and order. With the arrest of some of their leaders the agitation took a more violent form and felling of Reserve forests started on a large scale. Armed Adibasi mobs moved about in the Interior and threatened the non-Adibasis, two of whom were killed. They damaged ghat roads and telegraph communications in their attempt to march upon Rangpur and Baripada. To check lawlessness fire had to be opened on a few occasions and the movement gradually died out with the quartering of detachments of the Military Police Force, rounding up of agitators in specific cases, a few detentions, and the imposition of collective fines (pp 30-31)"

Emergence of Ganatantra Parishad

There are several strands discernible in these disorders, and while I can disentangle them, I am not competent to discuss them all, nor are they all relevant to the present theme. One element which I will notice but not enlarge upon is the role of the Adibasis and the Jharkhand Party and the neighbouring State of Bihar. It will be noticed that the major disorders took place in the northern hill areas. This area, which is now part of Orissa's 'Ruhr', has a large proportion of tribals in its population and it is here that the Jharkhand has its support in Orissa. There are frequent allegations that people from Bihar and the Jharkhand were concerned in fomenting Adibasi disorders. Particularly is this said to be true of Seraikella and Kharasawan.

But this is perhaps too delicate a subject to analyse, and in any case it is not my business to describe particular historical events. I merely notice that these Adibasi movements occurred, and remark that if in the beginning they were connected with the formation of the Ganatantra Parishad, there was soon a parting of the ways. The Ganatantra is staunchly Oriya Nationalist, and it has been a constant opponent of the Jharkhand, particularly since the Congress was kept in power by the five Jharkhand voters in the Orissa Legislative Assembly.

'Mentality of Conquerors'

The main lesson to be drawn from the events of 1948 and 1949 was that the Orissa Congress Government was not welcomed into the hill areas. There were many reasons for this. Firstly, and fundamentally, there was the long-established antipathy between the hill and the coastal areas: the feeling against 'Kalahiks' This meant that not only the ex-rulers, who had their own particular grievance and reason for being 'disgruntled', but also the small middle-class and the common people of the hill areas looked with alarm on the new incursion of 'Katakis' Nor, so it seems, was much attempt made to win them over. The officials and the police descended upon the ex-state areas looking for trouble, as they could hardly do otherwise in 1948. They came, as one of the Ganatantra MLAs said, 'with the mentality of conquerors': complaints and protests were treated as 'subversion'. It need not be assumed that all the administrators had this outlook, but the many accounts I have had of high-handedness are, to say the least, not rendered unlikely by the attitude revealed in the quotation from Oriassa 1950-51. People were imprisoned or 'extermed' from their home areas, and the ordinary mechanisms of democratic protest did not exist.

Secondly there were certain administrative discomforts following on the merger. A startling and immediate one was the price of rice. The ex-states were, in many respects, closed economies and shielded from the market prices ruling elsewhere in Orissa. I have been told that the price of rice increased fourfold overnight in some states, although I can find no published figures to substantiate this. In addition to this came the inconveniences of a large-scale bureaucracy. The personal local rule of the Raja vanished and in its place came an organization which could be moved into action only by unfamiliar and lengthy and complicated procedures, and often localized many miles further away. It would have been miraculous if the take-over had occurred without friction, and what ever went wrong was naturally blamed upon the administrators who had been sent up from the coast by the Congress Government. In their turn the administrators blamed their difficulties on local 'subversive elements' and 'agitators'. The Ganatantra is strong, for one reason, because it has the backing of the local intelligentsia, and I will summarize the background in 1948 from which the Ganatantra emerged by quoting at length from an interview which I had with a man from one of the ex-states.
Himachal Pradesh— a beautiful land of unforgettable scenic grandeur, cradled in the foothills of the Himalayas. The livelihood of the cheerful, hardy mountain people depend on farming, sheep-rearing or handicrafts. Living so close to Nature, their simple faiths centre round the mighty forces which govern their lives. Their communal life is full of symbolic rituals which culminate in colourful fairs held in propitiation of the Nature Gods. The Gaddi shepherds of Chamba invoke their presiding deity in a dance of breathtaking synchronisation and delicacy of movement.

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Price of Rice Shoots Up

"After the merger things were bad, as you know. We had to do something. The people could not swallow the merger: they were never consulted.

"There was a difference in the Administration after '48 too. Petty officials stayed. But they did not believe in our officers and all the high officials came from outside. It was just like a military occupation. Our civil servants were transferred to other districts. The ruler had no hand in the administration. We were handed over to the States Ministry of India, and they handed us over to the Orissa Government.

"There were all kinds of difficulties. For example, up to December 31st 1947 rice was selling at 8 seers to the rupee. On the next day it was 2 seers to the rupee, due to control price and fair price shops throughout Orissa. Then the medical facilities were free before the merger and the people were even being supplied with proprietary medicines. The institution was closed. There was good X-ray equipment, Siemens, one of the only three in India, got during the Jubilee celebrations, and that was left uncared-for and other equipment was taken away. The administration did not care for the people. They behaved like victors over vanquished. After all, we are Indian too, aren't we?

"This all this moulded the mind of the intelligentsia. Previously we had direct approach to the Raja and we could get our remedy. But the remedy now was far far away. All educated people felt something had to be done. We could not undo the merger. But bribery and corruption became so rampant and so vivid. Bribery was there before in the state time, but it was not in broad daylight.

People Not Consulted

"Everyone thought that something must be done. So we must have a party. Some of us went to the ruler and wanted him to start a party, since he had plenty of administrative and political experience. That was in 1949.

"There was firing in Seraikela and Kharsawan and Bamra and Mayurbhanj: that all led to a cumulative effect. Our people were actually being killed.

"We wanted everyone in the party, officials, everyone, so that we could end the misrule: we had to take everyone: there was a great shortage of people with administrative and political experience. We asked the ruler to participate and we went to other states to ask other people to take part.

"First we started a party that was called Khoshal-Utkal Praja Parishad. We established headquarters at Sambalpur, after the firing at Bamra. Prior to that, we were all taken into prison. I was in Cuttack gaol for one month. But they could not make any charge against me except that I opposed the Government. They could not produce us in court: it was just preventative detention. Then I was interned in my district. Then I was served with an externment notice. So I went to Chaibasa in Bihar. I had headquarters there. I went there because we wanted an Eastern States Union. One thing we considered was that they had not taken the consent of the people, but only of the rulers in getting us merged with Orissa. Secondly we had lost our own administration and were being ruled by outsiders in the name of democracy and self-rule. We wanted the right to self-determination. Patel never consulted anyone except the rulers in merging the states: not the people. The people were active in politics in the Garhjat areas (Feudatory States). We had our own Prajamandal Movements for getting popular rule in the states, and we had succeeded and we didn't want the Congress Prajamandal. We were getting self-rule by our own efforts. We did not want to be dictated to by outsider Congress Prajamandalists."

At the beginning of its life in 1948, while it was still called the Khoshal-Utkal Praja Parishad, the Ganatantra party had the inestimable advantage of being persecuted. I have already remarked upon the electoral asset of conducting an agitation and becoming a martyr. What the Congress gained in 1921 and 1930 and between 1939-42, the Ganatantra gained in 1948-49. Leaders were exterminated or interned, public meetings were forbidden, the police broke up meetings, there were firings and arrests, and the people who witnessed all these events or took part in them no doubt were too excited to perceive that the police were not suppressing 'popular movements to keep the people in abject bondage' but were 'guardians of the peace, engaged by a democratic government'. A broken head is equally painful, whether the lathi is wielded in the name of Imperialism or Democracy.

Special Position of a Raja

The Ganatantra is said to be a party of ex-rulers and we shall later see to what extent this is true and how far this criterion distinguishes this party from the Congress. But in the meantime some general remarks about the position of a Raja need to be made.

In an election the candidates first task, leaving aside the issue of party membership for a moment, is to let the electors know who he is and what he is. In this respect a king starts with a distinct advantage. Children grow up on a mythology of kings and queens in India as in England. 'King' has the gift of romance that cannot attach to 'lawyer' or 'businessman', still less to 'politician' or social worker'.

In all the Feudatory States there was the full ritual paraphernalia of kingship. The Raja, while not precisely the religious head of the state, was the manager of its temples, and was responsible for financing and for organizing the great festivals that take place every year, the Durga puja in the autumn and the Car festival early in the rainy season. One Raja, who left his state after 1948 and lived in Calcutta, still returned every year to initiate the Durga festival. The Orissa Government, recognizing the importance which the people attached to these festivals, took on the responsibility of financing them, just as the kings had done before. In short, the popular notice and affection which Ministers try to win by presiding at school prize-givings or similar functions, already belongs to the Raja and has belonged to his family for generations.

The Rajas, in fact, enjoyed that peculiar position of Royalty which combines remoteness with familiarity. Many of them were seldom seen outside their palaces except when they emerged to start the Car and sweep the ground before it. Yet everyone knew that the Raja was there. Many of the Rajas had training in the ICS and some of them played an active role in the administration of their states. But even when the Raja himself did not sit
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in the office there were formalized procedures to gain his intervention when his subjects were in difficulty with the administrators. I have already remarked on the way in which the largely alien administration served to shield the Rajas from the odium of government.

**Belongs to His People**

This is not to deny that life was difficult for subjects in many of the states, nor is it to imply that there is no foundation in the allegations made against the Rajas in the States Enquiry Committee Report, which the Congress published in 1939. But it does seem that either people have very short memories or only four years intervened between the merger and the first general election in which many Rajas or candidates supported by Rajas came out victorious—or else that whatever odium there was, it fell not so much upon the persons of the Raj family, but upon their administrators. It is also to be remembered that the exactions and impositions of the Rajas were sanctioned by tradition, and that they would not appear as outrageous to the state subjects as they did to the demographically-minded agitators who came from outside.

A king even a bad one belongs to his people, and for the greater part of the population in the ex-state areas the king alone symbolized their existence as a political unit, and indeed as a religious unit. There is a story about a Dutchman, before the war a noted hater of Jews, who risked his life to give shelter and protection to many Dutch Jews after the Nazi occupation of Holland, saying I hate all b—Jews. But these are our b—Jews.' To many of the states peoples, I was told by one Prajamanal worker, it seemed as if a gang of outsiders had descended on the state and driven out their ruler. There are echoes of this in the interview I have quoted above: the state's people would have preferred to deal with their problems themselves, and not to have a solution thrust upon them.

All these factors gave those Raj families who chose to go into politics a head start, and many of them turned out to be able organizers and energetic campaigners. But even those who were not particularly energetic had the dice very much loaded in their favour, and against the Congress.

**A 'Feudal' Party?**

Feudal', when applied to modern political institutions, has about it the right air of patronizing contempt to make it more a term of abuse than a scientific concept. But it can be given a fairly precise meaning. In terms of administrative organization a feudal system exists when functions are not specialized and divided between different persons, but the one man performs all functions in the area over which he has control. These powers are delegated downwards from a king, the division being made on the basis of territory. The obverse of 'feudal' is 'bureaucratic', rule by officials, where functions are divided between different offices (bureaux)...and within one territory there are several persons performing the functions which in a feudal system would reside in one man. It is precisely this contrast that I have been making in the course of these articles, when I compared the direct and simple paternal government of the smaller Feudatory States with the bureaucratic government in the Regulation districts.

But clearly the Ganatantra Parishad is not to be distinguished from other parties in Orissa by this meaning of 'feudal'. In its internal organization it is no closer to and no further from the feudal or the bureaucratic models than are the other parties

**No Worse than Any Other**

The second meaning which we might attach to 'feudal' is that the party support is in some way connected with the feudal organization which existed formerly in the Feudatory State:... Undoubtedly if is: various local feudal 'officials' (to mix the two concepts for a moment), the Gaontias or Nayaks or Bisoi or Patros as they are called in the different districts, are men of influence and lend their support in electioneering to the Ganatantra. But then every party tries to approach the electorate not as individual voters but in groups and congregations, and it is hard to make any mortal distinction between an approach which uses the groups of a 'feudal' system and one which works through contractors, the heads of caste-groups, village school masters, or any other local man of influence.

Thirdly, the party might be considered feudal because it makes use of loyalties and affections which the people in some states felt for their Raja. But again, it is hard to see how they could be expected to do otherwise, for from a moral point of view this is no different from the advantage which the Congress enjoys in the person of Nehru and of various local leaders. It is alleged that in certain areas among the backward people—for instance parts of Koraput—Ganatantra canvassers proclaimed that a vote for their party would mean the restoration of a member of the ruling house who was held in great affection by the people. Such tactics would certainly be a perversion, for it is obvious that no member of the ruling houses is likely to be restored to his throne. But apart from dishonesties of this kind to which all parties stoop at times, there can be no legitimate complaint if the Ganatantra makes use of the affection and regard in which some of their Rajas were held. In both respects in making use of a feudal organization and of feudal loyalties—the Ganatantra is a feudal party, but it is no worse than any other party for that: all parties make use of existing loyalties. By and large these loyalties are morally neutral: what matters is the use successful candidates make of the power given to them.

**Pledged to Bring about Socialism**

It is an easy fallacy to think that a party which rested initially on feudal loyalties is thereby dedicated to restoring feudalism. It is impossible for an outsider to know what is in the hearts of men, and one can judge only from what people do and what they say is their intention. Judged in this fashion the Ganatantra is not feudal. Its published manifestos and declarations of other kinds say nothing about restoring the kingship. Certainly the members of the party, the Raj families and the rest, are out for power, but the power they seek is just that which is held now by the Congress: it is kingly power. Like all the other parties which are at work in Orissa they are pledged to bring about socialism. Given their background, there is certainly a temptation to question their sincerity in this: but the same exactly...
might be said of many members of
the Congress.

Finally I permit myself a judg­
ment from conversations I have had
with members of all parties. I
have not infrequently listened to
the typically Fascist judgment that
It was a mistake to give everyone
the vote, for the people are not in­
telligent enough to make proper use
of it. I have also listened carefully
to pick out nuances which would
indicate what the members thought
of their constituents, and some*
times discerned an attitude which
varies from perplexity through irri­
tation down to disdain and outright
contempt. My impression of the
Ganatantra members, particularly
those who belong to Raj families,
is that on the whole they have more
faith in the integrity and intelli­
gence of their constituents, than do
the members of other parties: nor
have I heard from them the judg­
ment that people were not ripe for
democracy.

A Middle Class Party

The Ganatantra is rather a
middle-class party than a party of
aristocrats. Of its 51 members in
the 1957 house, twenty-five occupy
reserved seats. Of the remaining
26, eleven belong to Raj families
and fifteen come from the profes­
sional or commercial middle-class.
Of the eleven Raj family
members, three had been rulers of
states. In the present Coalition
cabinet (July 1959) there are five
Ganatantra Ministers: of these two
were rulers and three are middle-
class, one a doctor and two who
combined a law practice with poli­
tics. We shall sec in the next arti­
cle that the Congress after the 1957
elections was not so very different
in this respect.

There is very little evidence
that the Ganatantra represents
reaction or feudalism or only the
‗disgruntled princelings‘. One can
only make out a case for this by
picking out one or two of the more
spectacularly atavistic rulers, as­
suming (wrongly) that they were
typical of all rulers, and then rest­
ing the argument on the maxim
that a leopard cannot change its
spots. What the Ganantantra Pari­
shad in fact represents is the hill
area of Orissa. In this respect it
differs from the Congress: in ideo­
logy and outlook there is no obvious
discernible difference.

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