

## Problem of Peasant Uprising in Bihar

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**ABSTRACT**-This paper reveals that the peasants movements created an atmosphere for post- independence agrarian reforms, for instance, 'abolition of Zamindari.They eroded the power of the landed class, thus adding to the transformation of the agrarian structure. The growth of peasant movement's exercised considerable pressure on the Indian National Congress. Despite this, the Karachi Congress Charter did not even touch the fringe of the peasant problem. But the political pressure of the Kisan Sabha succeeded in the Faizpur Congress agrarian programme. However, the Congress could not under the pressure of the native bourgeoisie grant any radical concession to the peasant demands, at the cost of jeopardizing the interests of zamindars This was amply demonstrated by the performances of the Congress ministers during the short period that they were in office before independence.

The peasants suffered from high rents, illegal levies, arbitrary evictions and unpaid labour in Zamindari areas. In Ryotwari areas, the Government itself levied heavy land revenue.The overburdened farmer, fearing loss of his only source of livelihood, often approached the local moneylender who made full use of the former's difficulties by extracting high rates of interests on the money lent.Often, the farmer had to mortgage his hand and cattle. Sometimes, the money-lender seized the mortgaged belongings. Gradually, over large areas, the actual cultivators were reduced to the status of tenants-at-will, share croppers and landless labourers. The tyranny of zamidars along with the exorbitant rates of British land revenues led to a series of spontaneous peasant uprisings in different parts of the country during this period. The periodic recurrence of famines coupled with the economic depression during the last decades of the 19th century further aggravated the situation in rural areas and consequently led to numerous peasant revolts. The peasants often resisted the exploitation, and soon they realised that their real enemy was the colonial state. Sometimes, the desperate peasants took to crime to come out of intolerable conditions. These crimes included robbery, dacoity and what has been called social banditry.

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**Introduction**-Indian economy is primarily an agrarian economy. The main occupation of majority of the population is agriculture. Before Independence, India was a poor country and its agriculture was primitive in nature. Further, feudal lords had complete domination over the lands and there was an unequal distribution. After independence, the government's agriculture policy evolved a two-pronged strategy.On the one hand, there was a need to modernize agriculture and increase production, and on the other, bring about a uniform ownership system. In the early 1960s, new agricultural policies were introduced popularly under the banner of Green Revolution primarily to increase production. The policies were designed to provide financial support to the landowners and in turn increase their output by assuring access to all irrigational facilities.It was, however, only the rich and middle-class farmers, who could secure loans, invest in fertilizers and procure high-yield variety seeds. As the agriculture policies did not touch upon redistribution of the agriculture produce, the condition of small and marginal farmers deteriorated drastically. Further, constant oppression and exploitation by the rich farmers became rampant.

The failure of governmental measures in resolving agrarian problem has been widely recognized and admitted today. The land reforms and community programmes meant for promoting capitalist footing in India have only succeeded in intensifying the agrarian crisis. The Congress Government has not only failed in providing relief to the vast bulk of deficit farmers and agricultural proletariat, but its agrarian policy has aggravated their miseries. This fact has been sufficiently demonstrated by the various Government Evaluation Reports and non- official enquiries on the impact of welfare measures on rural society. Consequently, Indian agrarian society is seething with discontent-even after independence. This has led to a series of peasant struggles in different parts of the country.

The following were the notable agrarian movement of this phase – **Santhal's Revolution (1855)**

This revolution was not only against the British Raj as such but also against the zamidars who were vested with unjustified and unaccounted power of ownership of land that peasants had customarily considered and cultivated for millenniums as their own. The resolution was also directed against lenders who were given power to get peasants imprisoned for failure to repair their debts and against the autocracy of the officials. The santhals never thought that they could be evicted from

their ancestral home states holdings due to their failure to pay taxes and debts. It had happened.

The self-respecting, proud, unorganized, Indian peasants could never reconcile themselves to the preposterous right conferred by the British Government on the zamindar to distain their properties, including their draught cattle, grain crops but that too came to be the order of the day. So they rose in revolt against that unjust order, imposed upon them by the British imperialism through the convenient media of its allies viz, the Indian zamindars and moneylenders.

The peasant, 'landed themselves (especially in Patna District) to resist short measures; illegal cases and forced deliveries of agreement to pay enhanced rates. Also there had been combination of Raiats in east Bengal, who refuse to pay anything except what they considered just;

The santhals found their leaders in two brothers who claimed to have received some occult blessing from gods to put an end to the zhulum of officers and the deceit of merchants. As many as 35,000 Santhals formed their bodyguard. They armed themselves with their traditional weapons of lows, arrows, axes and swords. They began to march to Calcutta to place their petition before the governor to free them from their oppressors.

On 7th July 1855 one of the Government Inspector obstructed their march and provoked them into violence. Thus on the commenced their rebellion and their resultant massacre at the hands of the British. The British officers who had been smitten with remorse later conferred that it was it was execution; we had orders to go out whenever we saw the smoke of a village rising about the jungle. The magistrate used to go with us I surrounded the village with my repays and magistrate called upon the rebels to surrender. To such an unjust and peremptory order, the brave santhals knew only one answer to give that was defiance. There upon they were brutally tried upon and butchered in masses. The santhals displayed such exceptional courage and military discipline that they faced successive vollies of British bullets with reckless heroism and abandon.

**Changed Nature of Peasant Movements After 1857:**

- i. Peasants emerged as the main force in agrarian movements, fighting directly for their own demands
- ii. The demands were centred almost wholly on economic issues.

- iii. The movements were directed against the immediate enemies of the peasant—foreign planters and indigenous zamindars and moneylenders.
- iv. The struggles were directed towards specific and limited objectives and redressal of particular grievances.
- v. Colonialism was not the target of these movements.
- vi. It was not the objective of these movements to end the system of subordination or exploitation of the peasants.
- vii. Territorial reach was limited.
- viii. There was no continuity of struggle or long-term organisation
- ix. The peasants developed a strong awareness of their legal rights and asserted them and outside the courts.

**Weaknesses:**

- i. There was a lack of an adequate understanding of colonialism.
- ii. The 19th-century peasants did not possess a new ideology and a new social, economic and political programme.
- iii. These struggles, however militant, occurred within the framework of the old societal order lacking a positive conception of an alternative society.

**The Kisan Sabha Movement:-**After the 1857 revolt, the Awadh Talukdars had got back their lands. This strengthened the hold of the Talukdars or big landlords over the agrarian society of the province. The majority of the cultivators were subjected to high rents, summary evictions (bedakhali), illegal levies, renewal fees or nazrana. The First World War had hiked the prices of food and other necessities. This worsened the conditions of the UP peasants. Mainly due to the efforts of the Home Rule activists, kisan sabhas were organised in UP. The UP Kisan Sabha was set up in February 1918 by Gauri Shankar Mishra and Indra Narayan Dwivedi. Madan Mohan Malaviya supported their efforts.

By June 1919, the UP Kisan Sabha had 450 branches. Other prominent leaders included Jhinguri Singh, Durgapal Singh and Baba Ramchandra. In June 1920, Baba Ramchandra urged Nehru to visit these villages. During these visits, Nehru developed close contacts with the villagers. In October 1920, the Awadh Kisan Sabha came into existence because of differences in nationalist ranks. The Awadh Kisan Sabha asked the kisans to refuse to till bedakhali land, not to offer hari and begar (forms of unpaid labour), to boycott those who did not accept these conditions and to solve their disputes through Panchayats.

From the earlier forms of mass meetings and mobilisation, the patterns of activity changed rapidly in January 1921 to the looting of bazaars, houses, granaries and clashes with the police. The centres of activity were primarily the districts of Rai Bareilly, Faizabad and Sultanpur. The movement declined soon, partly due to government repression and partly because of the passing of the Awadh Rent (Amendment) Act.

#### **Peasant Activity in Provinces:**

**Bihar:-**Here, Sahjanand Saraswati was joined by Karyanand Sharma, Yadunandan Sharma, Rahul Sankritayan, Panchanan Sharma, Jamun Karjiti, etc. In 1935, the Provincial Kisan Conference adopted the anti-Zamindari slogan. The Provincial Kisan Sabha developed a rift with the Congress over the 'bakasht land' issue because of an unfavourable government resolution which was not acceptable to the Sabha. The movement died out by August 1939.

**Indigo Revolt-**Indigo growers' revolt had flared up in Bengal in autumn of 1959. On the one hand, this revolt was directed against the indigo planters, on the other, it grew into a rent strike against the planter zamidars. We shall refer briefly to the system of indigo cultivation in order to comprehend the issues involved in this peasant uprising, which was a landmark in the history of peasant movements in Bengal. The British merchants embarked upon indigo cultivations in Bengal and built factories in Malda, Padma, Nadia, Jessore, Midnapore, Rangpore, Rajsahi and Purnea. There is a great deal of evidence to show that the planters had to pay rent to the Bengal zamidars to get land for indigo cultivation. Some of them, notably Dwarkanath Tagore, chose to be planters. The value of land increased in villages where indigo cultivation had extended. Apparently the Bengal zamidars had a stake in indigo cultivation.

There were two forms of indigo cultivation—one of the system represented the cultivation on the planters land with the help of hired labour. Under the other system, peasants grew indigo on their own land under contract and received advances from the planters: they had to hand over the entire produce to the planters at fixed prices. The system based on advance, virtually became forced cultivation, further more it was becoming un-remunerative, since peasants could get better prices when they grew jute or tobacco, the evidence of Ashley Eden before the indigo commission reads, "Cultivation is not the result of free agency, but it is always compulsory. First, I believe it to be unprofitable and

therefore, cultivator will not consent to take up that cultivation; second, it evolves an amount of harassing interferences; recently as soon as the ryots became aware of the fact that they were by law and practically free agents they at once refused to continue the cultivation".

The indigo revolt started in Barasat, which had been the center of farazi disturbance in 1838. In March 1859 Eden, the magistrate of Barasat, declared that the ryots were free to grow whatever crops they liked. Hem Chandra Kar, a deputy magistrate, issued a parwana, based on Eden's instructions, on 20 August. As the knowledge of this parwana spread to villages, the peasants refused to sow indigo. By 1860 the revolt had spread to Nadia, Jessore, Palna, Rajsahi, Malda, Faridpur and Murshidabad. In February 1860, Herschel, the magistrate of Nadia reported that "there appeared among the ryots a general sense of approaching freedom". The peasants resisted the planter's attacks with whatever weapons they could collect, indigo factories were raided and burnt: the factor servants were beaten. Kling vividly describes the form of peasant resistance in this passage.

The fact was that power still remained with zamidars, who wanted to teach the Sahib planters a lesson. In the decade following the indigo revolt, which surely radicalized the peasants, rent disturbances continued to occur in a few regions and snowballed into an uprising in 1873.

**Contribution of the Indian National Congress.-**With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian National Congress began to champion the cause of the oppressed peasants. It imported a political significance-common cause with the nationwide freedom movement and anti-imperialist bias in to every one of struggles that peasants had to wage in order to free themselves from new imperialist impositions and machinations. Thus countrywide campaigns were organized with nationalism as their dynamo and economic pressure as their propellers against the vicious indenture labour system, contract labour in plantation-exploitation by European planters in India and other parts of British Empire. Now that political consciousness and organization were added to economic grievances, success began to dawn on the horizon of Indian peasant movement. The indenture system was abolished and some relief was obtained for plantation labour. A large number of risings took place in Malabar both in the last and present centuries. They were misnamed communal riots. Their basic causes which were the political and economic grievances of peasants against the local landlord were not sought to be

removed, of course there was always the tendency for communal leaders to exploit these basic factors. But thanks to the sacrifices made by the Mopilla peasants, the Madras Government had to pass the Malabar Tenancy Act., which conferred permanency of tenancy upon a very large section of peasantry.

#### **The Second Phase: Emergence of class conscious Organization.**

The Congress policy of safeguarding the interests of zamindars and landlords led to the emergence of independent class organizations of kisans in rural India. Radical sections in the peasants movements increasingly realized that the Congress was solicitous of the capitalists and land magnates. They Felt that to protect the interests of kisans, their own class organization and leadership must be evolved. Consequently, the kisan organizations came into existence in different parts of the country.

The first kisan Congress held at Lucknow in 1935 led to the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha. The programme of the Sabha reflected the aspirations and needs of the entire peasantry in agrarian India. The All India Kisan Sabha was composed of radical petty bourgeois individuals, within and outside the Indian National Congress. It was also supported and strengthened by the Congress Socialist Party and later on by the Communist Party of India. We shall now refer to some of the significant struggles launched by the Kisan Sabha in different parts of the country during the initial period of its inception.

In Indian Pradesh it launched an anti-settlement agitation against zamindars 'Zulumi' in 1927. Swami Sahjanand, one of the eminent leaders and pioneers of the All India Kisan Sabha led a heroic movement for the abolition of zamindari in Bihar. A powerful struggle was initiated against the oppressive forces & laws in South India in 1927. Similarly, in UP and other parts of India, agitations were launched against the tyranny of zamindars.

**Conclusion-**The history of peasant movements can be traced to the economic policies of the Britishers, which have brought about many changes in the Indian agrarian system. The consequences of the British colonial expansion were felt the most by the Indian peasantry and it rose in revolt from time to time. These peasant uprisings certainly did take place but were not recorded as such under colonial history, and they were considered acts of bandits and dacoits in the official records. A vast amount of information can be found in the archival data, which has

only recently been uncovered and written about. India is basically an agrarian economy with the bulk of rural population following the occupation of agriculture. Peasants formed the backbone of the civil rebellions, which were often led by zamindars and petty chieftains.

The best example of this is the revolt of 1857. Another set of peasant revolts occurred primarily on the issue of religion. Although they started out as movements of religious and social reform and purification, they could not hide their agrarian interests for long and openly attacked the new zamindars, landlords, and moneylenders, irrespective of their religion. At the end, they clashed with British political and economic hegemony, which led to the mass peasant movements. Even after independence, interests of the peasants have not been safeguarded. There were many peasant movements in the post-independent India.

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