



## STUDY ON CONCEPTUALIZING PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Dr. Aprajita

Associate professor in History, Govt. College, Sector-1, Panchkula, Haryana (India)

Email: [aprajita68@gmail.com](mailto:aprajita68@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** 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.

[Aprajita. **STUDY ON CONCEPTUALIZING PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA**. *Researcher* 2023;15(2):23-30]. ISSN 1553-9865 (print); ISSN 2163-8950 (online). <http://www.sciencepub.net/researcher>. 03. doi:[10.7537/marsrsj150223.03](https://doi.org/10.7537/marsrsj150223.03).

**Keywords:** Movement, Conceptualizing, Peasant, India

### Introduction:

Social Movements are social processes and are parts of social progression. These are broadly considered as sustained organized or collective efforts aiming to changes in thought, beliefs, values, attitudes relationships and major institutions in society or to resist any change in the societal arrangements. (H Blumer 1951; Haberle 1972; Guesfield 1971). Social movements emerge as manifestation of collective discontent against existing social, economic and political arrangements. Though the collective actions vary with time and space the important components such as ideology, organization, objective and leadership play a role in varying degrees in any social movement (Singha Roy, 2005).

Agrarian movements in India can be broadly classified into two main categories. Peasant Movements in India The first category includes the movements related to poor, small and marginal agriculturists whose economic condition and survival is mainly attached to agriculture and are termed as peasant movements. The second category includes those of more affluent agriculturists who can produce sufficient surplus from the agriculture.

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

moneylender 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 zamindars 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.

### CONCEPTUALIZING PEASANT AND PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

#### Peasant

Social scientists have broadly underlined the subordinated, marginalized and underdog position of the peasantry in human society. In the sociological and the anthropological literature peasants have widely been described as culturally 'unsystematic, concrete tradition of many, unreflective, unsophisticated and the non-literati constituting the mosaic of the "little tradition" (Redfield 1956), 'incomplete' and a 'part society with part cultures' (Kroeber 1948). Politically they are found to occupy an 'underdog position and

are subjected to the domination by outsiders (Shanin1984), unorganized and deprived of the knowledge required for organized collective action (Wolf 1984: 264–65). In economic terms, they are identified to be small producers for their own consumption (Redfield 1956), subsistence cultivators (Firth 1946) who produce predominantly for the need of the family rather than to make a profit (Chayanov 1966). Historically, peasants have always borne the brunt of the extreme forms of subordination and oppression in society. However the specific socio-economic conditions of their existence have largely shaped the roles of the peasantry in social change and transformation (SinghaRoy, 2005).

### Peasant and Caste Interface in India

In India, the term ‘peasant’ is ambiguous and used differently by different authors or variously by the same, author in different studies. On the one hand, it is used for those agriculturists who are homogeneous, with small holdings operated mainly by family labour, and on the other hand, it includes all those who depend on land including landless labourers, as well as supervisory agriculturists (Shah 2004). Peasants in India broadly represent a vast mass of landless agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants, poor artisans and small and marginal cultivators. They have a close social interface with the socially deprived, such as the scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, other backward classes and women. The so-called “outcastes” of the Varna hierarchy in the real sense of the term form the core of the peasantry in rural India. In the localised vocabulary, peasants are called by terms like “kisan”, “krishak”, “roytu”, “chashi”, etc, more or less indicating cultivators who cultivate land with their own labour and also the categories, namely, “adhiar” and “bhagchashi” (sharecropper and tenant) and “majdoor”, “majur”, “collie”, “pait”, “krishi” “shramik”, etc, agricultural labourers. These terms signify specific cultural connotations to indicate the marginalised and inferior status of peasantry in Indian society. Thus peasants are socially and economically marginalised, culturally subjugated and politically disempowered social groups who are attached to land to eke out a subsistence living (SinghaRoy 1992: 21-231)

### Peasant Movements in Indian Context

Scholars [Rao 1989; Dhanagare 1976]; Mukherjee 1979 have viewed peasant movements as a distinct variant of social movements and have endeavored to analyse these in terms of their linkages with changes in the organisation of production and class conflict. At an operational level, peasant movement has been conceptualised by SinghaRoy (1992) as an organised and collective effort of the

peasantry (subsistence and small producers, tenants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers) to bring about change in the pattern of ownership, control and use of land, share of agricultural produce, wage structure, credit and institutional support system and in other aspects of socio-economic life that have subjugated them in agrarian society (SinghaRoy 1992: 21-231). There is hardly any reported instance or literature on peasant uprisings in premodern India. Scholars attribute this to the traditional social structure prevalent in Indian villages that was organized through caste system and provided framework for all social activities and relations between various groups that induced lower castes to accept their place in the social order. This also made the central government largely superfluous and hence peasant opposition was less likely to take the form of massive peasant rebellion. However, it is largely accepted that the revolutionary potential of a particular class hinges largely on the structure of power alignment and class alliances in a given society, at a particular time and peasantry class in India is no exception (Shah 2004). Changes in the mode of production in agriculture have disturbed the traditional agrarian relationships which also led to peasant unrest. Under British rule, land became a marketable commodity and commercialised agriculture developed during the late nineteenth century.

The impoverishment of the Indian peasantry was a result of the transformation of the agrarian structure during the colonial period due to: a) Colonial economic policies, b) Ruin of the handicrafts leading to overcrowding of land, c) The new land revenue system, d) Colonial administrative and judicial system.

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 exploited 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 peasants often resisted the exploitation, and soon they realized that their real enemy was the colonial state. 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.

Radical and Reformative Movements Peasant movements can broadly be categorised as ‘radical’ or

'reformatory', depending on their particular combination with ideology, form of mass mobilisation, and orientation towards change. Radical movements are those that use non-institutional mass mobilisation, guided by an ideology of rapid change in the social structure. Though these movements are usually short-lived, they may be spread over a large geographical area. A reformatory peasant movement, in contrast, uses institutionalised mass mobilisation, is guided by an ideology of gradual social change, and tends to exhibit a longer life span. Peasant movements, however, are not discretely radical or reformatory; rather one may be an extension of another over a period of time (SinghaRoy 1992:21-231).

### PHASES OF PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Though there can be many classificatory systems used by different scholars for analysis, on the basis of period the peasant movements in India can broadly be grouped in three distinct time phases (Mehta1965: 14 -16).

1) The initial phase (1857-1921): Characterized by the sporadic growth of peasant movements in the absence of proper leadership.

2) The second phase (1923-1946):Marked by the emergence of the class conscious peasant organizations.

3) Post – independence phase: this era witnessed the uninterrupted continuity of the agrarian movements due to the failure of the ruling party to resolve any of the basic problems of the working masses of rural India.

#### The initial phase

During this period the main reason for a series of spontaneous peasant uprising in different parts of the country was high handedness of zamindars or landlords along with the excessive rates of land revenue. The situation in the rural areas was aggravated by periodic recurrence of famines and economic depression during this period leading to a number of peasant revolts. Notable peasant movements of this phase are:

- The Santhal rebellion of 1855
- The Maratha uprising of 1875
- The Bengal tenants struggles 1870-85
- The Oudh Insurrection
- The Punjab Kisan struggles in the last phase of the 19th century.
- Champaran Satyagraha (1917-18)
- The Kheda satyagraha(1918)
- Moplah Rebellion in Malabar (1921)

Champaran and Kheda were the prominent movements led by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

#### The Second Phase:

The peasant movements initiated by the Indian National Congress in 1917-18 were restricted to seeking relief against the excessive rates of land revenue, and were in no case directed against the zamindars ( Desai, 1979: 744). The Congress policy of safeguarding the interests of zamindars and landlords led to the emergence of independent class organizations of kisans in rural India. Consequently, the kisan organizations came into existence in different parts of the country. The Kisan Sabha movement started in Bihar under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati who had formed the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) in 1929 in order to mobilize peasant grievances against the Zamindari attacks on their occupancy rights. Gradually the peasant movement intensified and spread across India. In Andhra Pradesh it launched anti-settlement agitation against Zamindari zulum in 1927. Also a powerful struggle was initiated against the oppressive forest laws in South India in 1927. Similar movements were led in Uttar Pradesh and other parts of India against the tyranny of zamindars (Basavaraja 2015).

All these radical developments on the peasant front culminated in the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress (INC) in April 1936 with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati elected as first president. All India Kisan Sabha was composed of radical forces within and outside Indian National Congress, and was also supported by Congress Socialist Party and later the Communist Party of India (Ibid 2015). Communists were the major force that mobilised the peasants. Communist Party of India (CPI) started serious engagement with the peasantry after the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha. CPI increased its membership in the peasant front and set the stage for the most revolutionary struggles in the countryside. The CPI adopted itself to work at the grass root level and in the countryside through the Kisan Sabhas which initially was not a class based organization and rich farmers were well represented in it. In 1941-43 the All India Kisan Sabha passed into the hands of the CPI which under Swami Shajanand tried to build the Kisan Sabha as an organisation of the rural poor and thus alienating the rich and the middle farmers. By 1944-45 the CPI had complete control over the Kisan Sabha (Dhanagare, 1980). Thus, the Kisan Sabha became an organisation of the poor peasants, tenants, sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers. It is with this base that it could launch and lead agrarian struggles in the pre-independence period. The Tebhaga movement in Bengal (1946-47) and the Telengana movement (1946-51) in the former

Hyderabad state were led by the Communists (Mehta 1965).

### **Post-independence era**

In Independent India it has been the Left parties, who have been the main organisers of the peasants. Mobilisation has taken place on different issues like increase in agricultural wages, land to the tiller, etc. and the principal target has been the rural rich on whose mercy the landless labourers and the marginal peasants depend. Initially, CPI hoped that Congress government would bring about radical programmes to alter the landholding pattern in the countryside. Since the established Communists accepted the parliamentary form of struggle, independent India has not witnessed any major armed uprising in the countryside till the Naxalbari revolt in 1967.

The land reforms and community programmes meant for promoting capitalist Peasant Movements in India farming in India have only intensified the agrarian crisis. The Government has not only failed in providing relief to the vast bulk of deficit farmers and agricultural proletariat, its agrarian policy has also aggravated their miseries. This resulted in discontent in agrarian society even after independence and led to a series of peasant struggles in different parts of the country (Rao 2015). Both the mainstream Communist parties, the CPI and the CPI (M) have formed peasant organisations like the Kisan Sabhas and organisation of agricultural labourers for mobilising the concerned sections. They have achieved limited success in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura and in some other states. Similarly the CPI (M-L) has formed its peasant front, the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS) which is now active in many of the districts of Bihar and Jharkhand. It is organizing the rural poor and also the middle peasants by taking up issues which affect them. The non-parliamentary Left, like the Marxist Coordination Committee (MCC) or the Peoples War Group (PWG) have been mobilizing the rural poor in states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra and using violence as a strategy to address the question of the rural poor (SinghaRoy 1992).

Non communist Praja socialist party (PSP) was involved in several movements related to peasants in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in the post independence period upto 1960s. The Republication Party of India, a non-Marxist party, combined the cause of the agrarian proletariat and led their struggle at an all India level. In South India there were agitations known as tenants agitation, such as Kagodu Satyagraha in Karnataka during 1950-51 and Uttara-Kannada during 1950-70 etc., over the issues like forcible ejection, debts and rents. In the 1960's

Charan Singh emerged as the champion of the farmers' in the Indo-Gangetic belt of Northern India. He favoured the blending of Nehruvian and Gandhian strategies of development (Basavaraja 2015). In Punjab Kethbari Zamindari union came into existence in 1972 that led six major struggles till 1980. Tamilnadu Vyavasigal Sangam (TNVS) was inaugurated in 1966 under the leadership of Narayana Swamy Naidu that carried out four important agitations between 1970's and 1980's. Formation of Maharashtra Shekari Sanghatan under the leadership of Sharad Joshi and Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha (KRRS) under the leadership of Prof. M.D. Nanjundaswamy have created an atmosphere of widespread movements across the regions of the Indian Union (Mehta 1965).

### **RADICAL PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA The Santhal Rebellion of 1855**

The Santhal rebellion, also known as a Santhal Hul, classified as a tribal movement by many scholars, took place at present day Jharkhand and part of West Bengal (at the foothills of Rajmahal). It was a rebellion against the British colonial authority and against the zamindars, whom the Britishers had given ownership of land that peasants had traditionally cultivated and had imposed heavy rents. The rebellion was also directed against moneylenders who charged huge interest on borrowed money and government officials who were autocratic and indifferent to the grievances of Santhals. The Santhals were getting evicted from their land and settlements due to their failure to pay taxes and debts. Thus they became tenants on their own land or even bonded labourers (Sarda 2017, Venkateshwarlu 2015). The revolt broke out in July, 1855 when thousands of Santhals assembled at Bhogandih village and declared themselves free. The movement was organized and led by two brothers namely Sidhu and Kanhu who claimed that they received messages from supernatural powers to put an end to the 'zhulum' of officers and the deceit of merchants. They attacked zamindars and moneylenders to drive them out. This triggered a series of conflicts between the English East India Company's army and the Santhals. The Santhals fought bravely with their traditional weapons, such as, bows, arrows, axes and swords but they didn't stand a chance against the sophisticated firearms used by the East India Company troops and the rebellion was brutally suppressed by the beginning of 1856 (Ibid 2017, 2015).

### **The Maratha Uprising of 1875**

The typical conditions in the Ryotwari area caused an the agrarian uprising in the Poona and Ahmednagar districts in 1875. Wanting to have a



steady flow of large revenue the East India Company imposed excessive taxes on ryots for land which was to be paid in cash and without any regard to fluctuations in crop production due to famines or any other reason. The farmers turned to moneylenders who were mostly outsiders, in order to pay revenue and to save their land from forfeiture by the government. The farmers offered land as security and government favoring giving land to moneylenders in case the farmers fail to repay the loans. Thus peasants found themselves trapped in a vicious network with the moneylender as the exploiter and main beneficiary. In 1874, the growing tension between the moneylenders and the peasants resulted in a social boycott by the ryots against the moneylenders. The ryots refused to buy from their shops. No peasant would cultivate their fields. The barbers, washer Peasant Movements in India men, and shoemakers would not serve them. This social boycott spread rapidly to the villages of Poona, Ahmednagar, Sholapur and Satara. Soon the social boycott was transformed into agrarian riots with systematic attacks on the moneylenders' houses and shops. The debt bonds and deeds were seized and publicly burnt (Venkateshwarlu 2015). The government, justifying the activities of moneylenders, quickly moved against the agitating peasants and resorted to repressive activity. The peasants could not withstand for long against the terrible repression by the government and had to abandon these active struggles. The active phase of the uprising in Poona and Ahmadnagar lasted only three weeks. As a conciliatory measure, the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act was passed in 1879 (Desai 1979: 165).

### **Champan Satyagraha (1917-18)**

Even before the production of artificial blueing dyes by the chemical industry, Indian cultivators had been growing a plant called indigo (Neel) that yields dye for blueing cotton cloths. Demand for the dye indigo was quite high in the textile industry in Great Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This made indigo trade a highly profitable business. Many retired officers of the East India Company and young upstarts, acquired lands from native Zamindars in Bihar and Bengal and extended the cultivation of this crop on a large scale. Tenant farmers were forced to grow indigo crop under a system of oppression (Pradhan 1988). The tenant farmers were forced by the British planters to cultivate indigo in three twentieth part of a bigha of their holding, this was known as 'Teen Kathia' system. The planters forced indigo cultivation at the best portions of land and offered very low prices for the indigo output. The British administration was indifferent to the indignity, physical abuse and exploitation of farmers. When the indigo market was adversely hit by

the introduction of synthetic indigo in the world market in 1897 the planters started a new type of exploitation. Either the losses were transferred to poor peasants or they could give up indigo cultivation by paying higher rents for the land. This miserable scenario of indigo exploitation forced the ryots to resist, violently or otherwise, from time to time, against their oppressors but were cruelly crushed. The British administration instituted inquiries but most of it was eyewash in Bihar (Iyenger 2017).

Gandhiji came to know about this issue in early 1917. He was joined and assisted in his protest against such exploitation by prominent personalities like J.B. Kripalani, Babu Brajkishore Prasad and Babu Rajendra Prasad. Gandhiji's method of peaceful satyagraha and civil disobedience were unique but effective and had a positive impact on the minds of the downtrodden and poor peasantry. The government had to relent and called Gandhiji for talks and also made him a member in the committee to enquire into the plight of the indigo peasants. Based on the committee's report the Teen Kathia system was abolished (Ibid 2017). However, the recommendation did not resolve the problem of excessive rent and issue of low wages to the agricultural labours. It also remained silent on the exploitation of peasants by Indian Zamindars.

### **Moplah Rebellion in Malabar (1921)**

The Moplah peasant movement was engineered in August 1921 among the peasants of Malabar district in Kerala. The Moplah tenants were Muslims and they agitated against the Hindu landlords and the British government. While the elite among the Moplahs were traders and merchants, the Moplah masses of the Moplah worked as agriculturists who were tenants of Hindu landlords called Jenmis. The major grievances of the Moplah tenants were (i) Insecurity due to unfavourable land tenure system due to which Moplahs could be ejected from their land without any appropriate notice (ii) High renewal of fees fixed by the Jenmis (iii) High rent fixed for Moplah and discriminating them against Hindu Tenants. The impetus for the 1921 movement started with meeting of Malabar District Congress Committee at Manjeri in 1920 that supported the tenants' cause and demanded legislation to regulate landlord-tenant relations. Following this the Moplah tenants formed an association with branches in the whole of Kerala and thus brought the Moplah tenants under one organization. During the same time there was the Khilafat movement, in which Moplahs actively took part but finally ended up with an agitation against the landlords. The British government issued prohibitory orders against the Khilafat meetings in the beginning of 1921. In August 1921, police raided the mosque at

Tirurangadi to arrest a Khilafat leader and a highly respected priest. The police opened fire on the unarmed crowd killing many persons. Due to this, clashes ensued and government offices were destroyed, records burnt and the treasury looted. The rebellion soon spread into all Moplah strongholds. In the agitation the targets of Moplah attack were the unpopular Jenmis, police stations, treasuries and offices, and British planters. However, the Moplahs lost the sympathy of general the Malabar population because of the communal flavor and Moplah rebels were isolated. British repression did the rest and by December 1921 all re-sistance had come to a stop. The Moplah toll was quite heavy and about 2400 persons lost their lives (Mandal 1981).

#### **Tebhaga Movement in Bengal (1946-47)**

The word Tebhaga literally means three shares of harvests. The movement was started for the reduction in the share of the produce from one-half to one-third, which they traditionally used to pay to the jotedars, the intermediary landowners. The movement arose in North Bengal and included the districts of Dinaipur and Rangpur in East Bengal and Jalpaiguri and Malda in West Bengal. This was organised by the Kisan Sabha and marked a departure from the pattern of movements by Indian National Congress (SinghaRoy 1992). This movement grew against the backdrop of the deteriorating economic conditions of the sharecroppers (known locally as bargardars); while the intermediary landowners (known as jotedars) flourished. The Permanent settlement 1793 introduced in Bengal, brought in a number of intermediaries between the Zamindars and the peasants. These jotedars used to sublet their land to the sharecroppers, known as bargardars, who cultivated the land and used to pay a half of the produce to the jotedars. The bargardars had only temporary rights in the piece of land for a fixed period usually five years. In addition there was exploitation of the rural economy by moneylenders who were giving credit Peasant Movements in India to the jotedars and peasant owners (middle peasants) at high rates. The peasant owners often lost their land and became bargardars on their own pieces of land or agricultural labourers when they failed to pay back their debts (SinghaRoy 2005). The Krishak Praja Party formed the first popular Ministry in Bengal in 1937. The Land Revenue Commission appointed by it recommended in 1940 that "All bargardars should be treated as tenants, that the share of the crops legally recoverable from them should be one-third, instead of half" (Vol. I, 1940: 69). The government did not show urgency to implement these recommendations. This prompted the All India Kisan Sabha to radicalize its agrarian programme and in November 1946 the Bengal Kisan Sabha, its provincial branch, passed a resolution in Calcutta for ‘

Tebhaga’ (two thirds share of the produced crops) for the sharecroppers and land to the tiller (Ibid 1992).

North Bengal, especially the Dinajpur district became centre of the Bengal Kisan Sabha activity because of the high concentration of the sharecropping system of land. The poor peasantry of Khanpur village, who were mostly from the scheduled castes (Rajbansi, Polia, and Mali), the scheduled tribes (the Oraon, Colkamar Santal) and ex-tribes (Mahato) responded spontaneously to the movement. The main struggles were during the harvest season when the bargardars refused to provide the half share of paddy to the jotedars and took away the paddy to their houses or kholan (courtyard). A local jotedar filed FIR against the bargardars. Police entered the village on the morning of 20 February 1947 and arrested a few bargardars. The news spread like wildfire all over the village, and an alarm was raised by the beating of drums, blowing conch shells and beating of gongs and utensils by the peasant women. Soon a huge mass of sharecroppers and poor peasants, with conventional weapons, from Khanpur and its neighboring villages assembled and demanded release of the arrested sharecroppers. But the police was adamant and fired 119 rounds, killing 22 protesters, including two women, and injuring hundreds (SinghaRoy 2005). This episode of Khanpur triggered off the Tebhaga movement very quickly in most parts of Bengal. Poor peasants ignoring their conventional ties with the landowners declined to share half of their produce with the landowners. Protest, firing and killing became part of this movement. The colonial rulers used all possible repressive measures to crash this movement by introducing a reign of terror in the rural areas and the movement eventually collapsed in mid-1947. However, the movement was successful to an extent as an estimated 40 percent of the sharecroppers were granted Tebhaga rights by the landowners themselves (SinghaRoy 2005).

#### **Telangana Movement (1946-52)**

The Telangana Movement was a fight against the feudal oppression of the rulers and local landowners of Andhra Pradesh. It was launched by CPI through its peasant wing, the Kisan Sabha. The agrarian social structure of Hyderabad state under Nizams was very oppressive in the 1920s and thereafter. Two types of land tenure systems were prevalent, namely, Khalsa or Diwani and Jagirdari. The former was similar to Ryotwari system where the peasants owned patta in their names that were registered and the actual owners were shikmidars. In the jagirdari system crown lands were granted to the Nizam’s noblemen in return for In rural the economy, the jagirdar and deshmukh, locally known as dora, had immense power at the local level. They were the

intermediary landowners (with higher titles) cum money lenders cum-village officials and were mostly from the upper caste or influential Muslim community backgrounds. Because of their privileged economic and political status they could easily subject the poor peasantry to extra-economic coercion known as vetti (force labour). Under this system the jagirdars and deshmukhs could force a family to cultivate his land and other works that would continue from generation to generation. A system known as Bhagela was also prevalent under which the tenants who had taken loans from the landlords had to serve the landlords until the debt was repaid. They served for generations as the records which were maintained by landlords were manipulated to keep them indebted. (SinghaRoy 2005).

The movement led by the Communists began in Nalgonda district in 1946 which spread to the neighboring Warangal and Bidar districts and finally engulfed the whole of the Telengana region. The movement was against the illegal and excessive extraction by the rural feudal aristocracy and thus concerned with the whole of the peasantry. The demands included writing off of peasants' debt. The movement took a revolutionary turn in 1948 when the peasants formed an army and started fighting guerilla wars. Over 2,000 villages set up their own 'People's Committees'. These 'Committees' took over land, maintained their own army and own administration (Mehta, 1979). Razakars, a private militia, organised by Qasim Razvi to support the Nizam, brutally started crushing the armed revolts by the peasants. The armed resistance continued until 1950 and was finally crushed by the Indian army. The movement was ultimately called off in 1951. The cost of the movement was quite heavy. As many as 4000 communists and peasant militants were killed; more than 10,000 communist cadres and people's fighters were thrown into detention camps and jails for a period of 3-4 years (Sundarayya, 1985:4).

#### **Naxalite Movement in West Bengal (1967-71)**

The peasant uprising that occurred in the Naxalbari thana in the Darjeeling district of northern part of West Bengal in May 1967 is one of the major uprisings post - colonial India that has witnessed. It was organised against large scale eviction of sharecroppers by jotedars resulting in the deteriorating condition of poor peasants and the government's failure to enact Land Reform Laws effectively. After independence, the Govt. of West Bengal enacted the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act (1953) to abolish zamindari and other intermediary systems. The West Bengal Land Reform Act (1955) was enacted to put a ceiling on landholdings, to reserve 60 per cent of the produce for the sharecroppers and to restrict the

eviction of sharecroppers. However, due to ineffective implementation of the provisions, eviction of the tenants and the sharecroppers continued. This resulted in sharp downward mobility of the peasants along with economic insecurity and unemployment. The proportion of sharecroppers decreased from 16 per cent of the rural households in 1952-53 to 2.9 per cent in 1961-62. Though the proportion of the marginal and the small cultivators increased among the rural population due to land transfers, the poor peasantry was in a difficult condition due to livelihood insecurity. This can be seen from the census data of Peasant Movements in India 1961 and 1971 that showed the phenomenal increase of the agricultural labourers from 15.3% in 1961 to 26.2% in 1971 and the decline of the category of cultivators from 38.5% to 32 % during the same period (Census of India 1961, 1971).

#### **References:**

- [1]. Basavaraja, M.G. (2015): An Economic Analysis of Farmers Movement: A Case Study of Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha (KRRS). PhD Thesis, University of Mysore at(pp 21-22)
- [2]. Blumer, H. (1951): "Social Movements" in A. N. Lee (ed), *New Outline of Principles of Society*, Baines D Noldi, New York.
- [3]. Brass, Tom (1994): "Introduction: The New Farmers' Movements in India" in *The Journal of Peasants Studies*, Volume 21, April 1994 – Issue 3-4: New Farmers' Movement in India.
- [4]. Chayanov, A. V. (1966): *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (translated by D. Thorner, R. E. F. Smith and B. Kerblay), Irin, Glencoe, Illinois.
- [5]. Desai, A. R. (1979): *Peasant Struggles in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- [6]. Dhanagare, D. N. (1983): *Peasant Movements in India 1920-1950*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- [7]. Firth, R. (1946): *Malaya Fishermen: Their Peasant Economy*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., London.
- [8]. Gusfield, J. R. (ed) (1971): *Protest, Reform and Revolt: A Reader in Social Movements*, John Wiley and Sons, New York.
- [9]. Gupta, Dipankar (1997): *Rivalry and brotherhood: politics in the life of farmers in northern India*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta.
- [10]. Haberle, R. (1972): 'Types and Functions of Social Movement' in *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Macmillan Company Free Press, New York.

- [11]. Iyengar, Sudarshan (2017); Champaran Satyagraha, Gandhi Research Foundation at [http://www.gandhifoundation.net/pdf/GRF\\_Champaran\\_Satyagraha.pdf](http://www.gandhifoundation.net/pdf/GRF_Champaran_Satyagraha.pdf) accessed on 10.01.2019
- [12]. Kannan, K. P. (1988): Of Rural Proletarian Struggles: Mobilization and Organization of Rural Workers in South-West India, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- [13]. Kroeber, A. L. (1948): Anthropology, Harcourt, Brace and World Inc, New York.

2/3/2023