

PEASANT MOVEMENT AND GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Many peasant movements occurred in India which were based on Gandhian Philosophy. We can take examples of few peasant movements such as peasant movement in United Province. United Province was one of the most important province of British government. Peasant movements occurred in various parts of United Province, especially in Awadh, after the emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics. In 1921 the peasants of Awadh started movements against colonial government with the help of Indian National Congress and Kisan Sabha. The peasants of Faizabad district, Rae Bareli district and Sultanpur district, started movement. Earlier, these peasants adopted violent method and looted bazars, shops, attacked on the houses of landlords and they also opposed police. The same situation occurred in Agra province also. These peasant movements became known in national politics at that time, therefore, the nationalist leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and many other local leaders paid their attention towards these movements. Gandhi went to the peasants of Awadh in February 1921, and told them that as they were fighting for attaining Swaraj, they would have to follow some principles in their movements. Gandhi provided some oaths to the peasants so that they would not be violent. The oaths were like, they would not hurt anyone, they would not loot any shop, they would show kindness, and they would not refuse to give taxes to the government and landlords. zamindars to Pandit Motilal Nehru, they would treat zamindars as their friends. These oaths were especially to those peasants of Awadh who were engaged in the violent actions and activities in the movements. In this way Congress, under the guidance of Gandhi, tried to lead these peasant movements peacefully. The main cause behind the peasant's movements in Bihar was the effect of indigo cultivation on the land fertility. The peasants were forced to cultivate indigo in a fixed area of their land. Gandhi came to Champaran and saw the situation of the peasants on the request of Rajkumar Shukla, a local peasant of Champaran. After Gandhi's visit at Champaran, the colonial government constituted a committee to see the situation of the peasants and to solve peasant's problems.¹In 1930s, the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha played very important role in building a rural base for Indian National Congress in Bihar. Kisan Sabha convinced Indian National Congress to look into the peasant's issues.²Peasant's movements followed non-violent path during Non-Cooperation Movement in Bihar. But peasant's problem did not end in Bihar because peasants were continuously opposed by the zamindars. This act of zamindars became the cause of another movement which is known as "Santhal Bataidars" in Purnea district of Bihar in 1938. This movement continued till 1942. Bihar Province Kisan Sabha led this movement.³

Many peasant's movements occurred in Orissa during and after the Non-Cooperation Movement. These movements were also led by the Indian National Congress. The reason behind peasant's movement in Orissa was the exploitation of peasants by the zamindars and the colonial government. The Utkal Provincial Congress Committee played very significant role in these peasant movements. Utkal Union Conference was also a peasant's organization which participated in these movements. The leaders like Lala Hansraj, A.V. Thakkar, and Mohanlal etc. participated in these peasant movements. Gopabandhu Das opened "Satyabadi School" in Orissa province. Gandhi appreciated the role of Gopabandhu in these peasant movements.⁴The peasant movements in Orissa were based on Gandhian ideology because these movements followed the path of non-violence. In Kerala, Mappilas revolt occurred during the Non-Cooperation Movement. Mappilas were the Muslim community of Malabar district of Kerala. Earlier, they were in good position and their trade developed, but after the arrival of European colonial power in India, Mappilas became peasants and lost their command on trade. But after the establishment of British government their condition became too pitiable. High taxation and establishment of zamindari system became the cause of their problems.⁵They rose their voice against both the British Government and Hindu landlords. All India Home Rule League and District Congress Committee started participating in these movements against the exploitation of Mappilas peasants. Many Indian National Congress leaders along with Gandhi, participated in this movement. Gandhi gave his support to this movement in early phase but soon this movement became violent. Many Congressi leaders argued that the British government was responsible for making this movement violent, but, finally Gandhi decided to withdraw from this movement. Gandhi did not want to lead any movement which was based on violence . Gandhi has been criticized by E.M.S. Nambudiripad because he stopped supporting the Mappilas rebellion.⁶

Peasant Movements started at Mewar in Rajasthan in 1905. This movement was against Parmar Rajput who was a jagirdar of Bijolia Jagir. This movement was done by the peasants. There were 86 different cases on the peasants, therefore, the peasants started protest in 1905. But this movements could not continue for long time. It was stopped by the local power but again it started in 1913. This time this movement was led by some leaders like Sitaram who was a sadhu. In 1915, some new leaders joined this movement. They started "no tax campaign". Later, the leaders of this movement joined Indian National Congress unit in Rajasthan.⁷

Again, the peasant movement started by the tribal peasants in this state which was known as Bhil tribal peasant movement. Gandhi participated actively in this movement. Later, this Bhil movement also merged in national movement. There were no violent incidents in this movement and the leaders were related with the Indian National Congress, therefore, this movement was also supported by Indian National Congress.

Bhoodan Movement was launched by VinobaBhave after Independence in 1951. This movement was started in Telangana. Bhave appealed to the landlords that "we are all brothers. Give us an equal share. We conceive daan, that is, charity, as an equal distribution

of one's riches". Vinoba's intention was to change the heart of the big zamindars and landlords. Vinoba had very clear view about land holding. He refused to accept less than two acres from those landholders who had hundred or more acres land. He wanted social justice for all. He initiated this movement at the old age of sixty years. Vinoba appealed to the big landowners to show charity for the poor peasants. Nehru said about VinobaBhave that he was the true successor of Gandhi. Vinoba also followed the Gandhian Ideology of peace and appealed for heart change.

After independence, The aim of VinobaBhave was to create a casteless, classless and stateless society which should be based on love and nonviolence. Therefore he adopted the idea of utopian society, based on Bhoodan, Shram Dan, Buddhi Dan and Prem Dan. He also developed the concept of Gram Dan³. His idea of Bhoodan was based on the concept of Sarvodaya. He found that the problem of land is one of the most serious problems in Indian society and there was only one solution to this problem that the land should be distributed among all. Vinoba was not in favour of taking land by force but he said that if a landlord has five sons then he should consider them six and the sixth part should be given to the landless.⁸The Bhoodan movement was successful and many landlords gave their land as a charity. A movement may be based on violence or non-violence. As far as the peasants movements are concerned which happened under the Gandhian ideology, they were based on non-violence. If Gandhi saw that any movement was going on violently, he withdrew from that movement. Gandhi had a very clear view about non-violence. Indian National Congress, under the leadership of Gandhi, tried to initiate the movement through non-violent way. Gandhi insisted on non-violent methods because he was of the view that violence took us away from the truth. So for him, everyone should follow the non-violent path to know the truth.

CONCLUSION

Peasant movement is a very important part of social movements. Social movements happen because of the social exploitation of the lower sections of the society. Peasant movements in India happened because of many reasons like the exploitation by the colonial government, exploitation by landlords and zamindars and other elite sections of the society. Peasant movements have also the same nature and ideology which the social movements have. Peasant movements have also some concepts like collective mobilization, organization, leadership, ideology, nature etc. If we see peasant movements in Indian context, we find that the peasant movements in India 4 Jotedars were peasants with small landholders. Gandhian Philosophy focuses on non-violence and Satyagraha. This Philosophy emphasises on non-cooperation with the ruling class. Gandhian Satyagraha has no possibility for the violence or any kind of physical force. In Gandhian ideology, the Satyagraha is a process of transformation. Gandhian ideology is based on heart change, therefore, in many movements, Gandhi believed that the heart of the ruling class would change. Gandhian ideology was used by many leaders of Indian National Congress like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and many local leaders of the various parts of the country. Those peasant movements which were based on

Gandhian philosophy, followed non-violence. The Indian National Congress did not support those movements which were based on violence.

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