

CC-12: HISTORY OF INDIA (1750s-1857)

VI. POPULAR RESISTANCE:

(A). PABNA AGRARIAN LEAGUES (1873)

When the elites of the India society were busy in initiating social and religious reforms to change their society from within to answer the moralistic critiques of the West, the rural society was responding to the imposition of the colonial rule in an entirely different way. In contrast to the urban intelligentsia, who were also the chief beneficiaries of the colonial rule, the response of the traditional elite and the peasantry, who were losing out as a result of colonial imposition, was that of resistance and defiance, resulting in a series of unsuccessful attempts at restoring the old order.

Tribal and Peasant Movements were isolated outburst against local grievances though more or less similar in characteristic, which were primarily economic in nature. The primary target was local vested interest; British officers came into conflict due to question of law and order which were involved there.

The peasants themselves often on their own initiative offered resistance to British rule. In a broad sense it can be said that the changing economic relations in the Colonial period contributed to peasant grievances and their anguish found expression in various rebellions

In East Bengal the peasantry was oppressed by zamindars through frequent recourses to ejection, harassments, illegal seizure of property, arbitrary enhancement of rent and use of force. Consequently, the peasants organised no rent union and launched armed attacks on the zamindars and their agents. Pabna

district was the storm-centre of this movement and hence the movement is known as the Pabna peasant movement.

The Act of 1859, provided ryots with immunity from eviction. Landlords enhanced rent through imposition of variety of adwabs (cesses). The attempts of zamindars to annihilate the tenant's newly acquired occupancy rights and to convert them into tenants at will, through forcible written agreement resulted into harassment and atrocities that was vehemently opposed by peasants under the leadership of Ishan Chandra Roy and Sambhunath Pal etc.

In 1873, peasants of Yusufshahi Pargana of Pabna organised an Agrarian League, which raised funds to mitigate litigation expenses, held mass meetings to which villagers were called by sounding of buffalo horns, drums etc. Peasants did not object to hike in rent.

In fact, the Agrarian League spread very fast and they wanted to become Queens's Ryots for securing redressal of their grievances. Pabna uprising is rarest example, where peasants did not defy colonial authority and as a matter of fact wanted to become Ryots of the queen.

Pabna rebellion is a landmark since, it brought about change in perception between individual rights of zamindar and peasants respectively. The Pabna Agrarian League and similar movements in other districts evoked sharply varied reaction among the British intelligentsia. The zamindars dominated British Indian Association was bitterly hostile, and its organ Hindoo Patriot tried to portray the Pabna movement as a communal agitation of Muslim peasants against Hindu landlords. Attempts were made to paint the movement with communal colour since, majority of peasant activists were Muslims and Pabna has 70% Muslim population. However, such attempts are diluted by the fact that two of their prominent leaders were Hindus, Ishan Chandra Roy (landlord) and

Shambhu Nath Pal (village headman) while Khodi Mulla (Jotedar) was a Muslim. However, the communal element was as yet virtually absent.

The movement was suppressed only after armed intervention by the government. Later an enquiry committee was appointed to look into the complaints of the peasants which led to the enactment of an act.

VI. POPULAR RESISTANCE:

(A). DECCAN RIOTS (1875)

So far, it has been seen that outbreaks aimed at something like a total change, often with strong religious and millenarian overtones (natural in change, the absence of any secular modern ideology of social transformation), and rooted in the lowest depths of Indian society- tribals and poor peasantry. But there was also a tradition of another type of rural protest, sparked off by particular grievances and with specific and limited objectives, and deriving its leadership and much of its support from relatively better-off sections of the peasantry. In the Maharashtra Deccan, for instance, the rich peasant development brought about by the cotton boom of the 1860s had been abruptly cut short by the fall in prices in the next decade-a fall which coincided with sharp upward hikes in land revenue from 1867 onwards. The riots were direct outcome of the exploitative nature of Ryotivari System and over assessment associated with it. Cotton boom of 1860's was abruptly cut short by fall in prices due to end of American Civil War (1861-65). This widened with the sharp rise in revenue by government.

In 1867, government raised revenue by 50 percent. The result was widespread indebtedness, and the immigrant Marwari money- lender became an obvious target of popular anger. The anti-sowkar Deccan riots of May-September 1875 affected 33 places in 6 talukas of Poona and Ahmednagar districts, and took the

form of forcible seizure of debt bonds by enraged villagers led by their traditional headmen (patels). Riots were significantly uncommon in areas where the moneylenders were not outsiders but local petty-landholders or rich peasant elements turning to usury and trade (like the khots in Ratnagiri).

The trouble started in village Kardeh in Senur Taluka in December, 1874, when a Marwari moneylender, Kalooram obtained a decree of eviction against Baba Saheb Deshmukh, a cultivator in debt to him for 150 rupees. This further polarised the class/caste difference between the Vanis and Kunhis, (Cultivators of Kardeh village decided to boycott moneylender socially and economically, which forced the latter to leave the village.

Soon the passive resistance spread to other villages of Poona and Ahmednagar and turned violent on 12th May, 1875. Peasants gathered in Supa in Bhimthadi Taluka on the bazaar day and began a systematic attack on the money-lenders house and shops. The riot took the form of forcible seizure of debt bonds.

Government had to rush police and army to control the situation and the uprising was completely suppressed (1875). Government appointed the Deccan Riot Commission to investigate into the causes/course of uprising. Four years after the disturbances, the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879 provided some limited protection to better-off peasants through strengthening judicial procedures and remedies.

NOTES, REFERENCE AND ESSENTIAL READING

Sarkar Sumit, Modern India 1885-1947