SEVENTH CHAPTER

CONCLUSION

PEASANT MOVEMENTS

IN

U.P. 1920-50
Attempt has been made in the foregoing pages to examine some of the major instances of Peasant Resistance and revolt that occurred in different parts of U.P. from 1920-50, with special reference to Awadh region.

Its structural setting, class character and historical circumstances present a wide spectrum. In this chapter or task is to relate these facts to each other systematically in the hope of discovering what kinds of social structure and historical situation produce peasant movements and revolts. The united province has been the center of Indian culture and civilization. And agriculture had always provided a support system to industrial part and also provided economic support the entire state.

Its industrial potential was destroyed by the British who believed in the policy of exporting poverty to India in the interest of their own industries unfortunately even the agricultural base of the state was corroded by imperfections in its system of land tenure much to the distress of the actual tillers of the soil. After the revolt of 1857 the British evicted tenancy laws in 1859 for the first time with an over emphasis on retention of intermediaries and these continued to operate with amendments from time to time. The feudal system which was retained by the British Crystallized into two main categories, viz. zamindars and taluqdar in the two contiguous parts of Agra and Awadh. They were the owner of the land and the actual tenant was left to their mercy and exploitation.

The Peasant in U.P. elsewhere in any other part of the country was traditionally bound to a family system. The entire family member had to share a common mud hut and a common budget labouring constantly for his
square meal. Children had to forego the rarely available education and be engaged in all sorts of manual labour like collection of firewood, weeding out grass and other growth harmful for crops and in seasonal manual works they had to do paddy transplantation, cutting of sugarcane, winnowing. In this way used to give full attention to bring forth maximum produce from out of his meagre holdings to sustain his family. Many times his crop production depended on the bounties of nature.

The Peasant movement in United Provinces was the upshot of feudal oppression practiced in a colonial set-up by the taluqdors. They had a constant fear of losing his holdings through ejectment by the taluqdar or zamindar. The Peasants were at the tender mercies of taluqdar and the former toiled for the latter like “a blind samson”. Besides these the peasants had good many liabilities. There were mainly in the form of marriages and ceremonial, festivals and funerals.

The taluqdar came to be increasingly recognized by the British Government as an important means of upholding the economic and political structure of imperial rule. Their powers were allowed to grow manifold and they became and “emperium within an imperio”. They emerged as the bastion for the consolidation and stability of the British Empire. The profit lust of the Taluqdar reduced the peasantry to the status of tenancy and further, of landless agricultural labourers. The heavy drains peasant’s resources resulted in constant indebtedness, very often he had to pawn the ornaments or family trinkets to meet the aforesaid eventualities. Usually, the village pawnbroker-the traditional bania (merchant or grocer) - the agents of the taluqdar or the taluqdar himself, took advantage of such opportunities
and change interests varying from 25% to 50% seldom was the hope of the peasant to get back those valuable realized, as the compound interest exceeded the value of the ornaments.

The Britishers were more interested in collection of land revenue from the vast multitudes of the U.P. Peasantry. The Taluqdars became the conduit pipe through which the land revenue collections flowed from the countryside to the imperial treasury with minimal expenditure. The British came to regard the taluqdars as the natural leaders of the peasant masses because they needed an oppressive social force for their colonial hold in the countryside.

And the conversion of revenue dues from kind to cash also led the peasant in debt because they had to sell their crop produce at cheap harvest price which were naturally cheap. But in his lean days the cultivator purchased the same at higher prices or was compelled to borrow from the hoarder bania. On the other hand whenever Taluqdar faced economic crisis, the government brought in the court of wards to sustain his authority.

The British visualized that the base of imperialism would spread into the country side through this dominant social unit. However the social base of the imperialism did not enlarge beyond this unit, because the talqdars, while safe guarding the interests of the imperial government had always very oppressive towards peasants that the economic cleavage widened and class tensions because intense. Very often the taluqdars advanced petty loans to tenants of lower caste which went on multiplying with the passage of time that the tenant could never free himself from that bond and even his
successor also worked for calendar as a labour. And it destroyed whatever coherence and harmony existed in tenant talukdar relating.

The Peasant movement in Oudh arose at a time when the oppression and exploitation of the helpless peasantry were at their maximum and national and inter national circumstances imported a new consciousness among the people. The first world war added to the miseries and discontent of peasants on account of forced war collections, recruitment and cesses like larai chanda and Bharti Chanda etc. which were super imposed on a rack rented tenantry living under the constant threat of ejectment.

The tenancy was also expected to take their pairs of oxen to till his fields at least one day. It hardly mattered whether the tenant’s field itself was crying for similar tillage. Even the children of the tenants had to go transplantation work of the taluqdars. The illegal exactions of nazrana and arbitrary cesses crushed the peasantry, the former system that of tilling the land of the master -was known as hari (har or hal plough-lending) while the latter was known as begari (unpaid labour). But the bitterest cup of sorrow for the tenant was the uncertainty of his tanure of the land under his plough. Earlier the revenue was paid directly to the treasury. Later the practice had been substituted by the contract system. As a result the contractors paid a fixed annual sum to the Nawab’s treasury and fleeced the tenancy to the maximum for their own gains.

The promises of imperial government and allied leaders were falsified by the enactment of rowlatt act. The massacre of Jaliawalla in Amritsar exposed the brutality of British imperialism. The victory of socialism in
Russia offered a new model of emancipation which paved way to the inspiration of the peasantry. Taking advantage of the troubled conditions of the times, not only the dispossessed Rajput families but also the former Nawab’s lieutenants, officials and contractors and other “faithfuls” of the British during the revolt, come to be denoted with honorific taluqdar with very wide powers. Though they were not allowed any armed following, yet they were allowed to retain a limited number of arms in view of their privileged position. Taluqdar had the favour of the ruling British on his side and direct access to the officials of the district and the commissioner. The militant rural intelligentia, often representated by the Babas and Fakirs played a vital role in building anti-land lord and anti-colonial sentiment. Soldiers who had served in the war and were the victims of the false promises were also rely to strike against the enemies of the peasantry. Baba Ram Chandra was the leading spirit. It had been seen that after 1857 the taluqdar were secure under the British umbrella and taluqdar considered himself a Raja (many were honoured with this title as well) since the pressure of the growing population on land was great the taluqdar with the help of Patwari and even with the Kanungo afflicted the tenantry with impunity.

He could eject any tenant and if a tenant tried to seek redress in courts, he was either browbeaten or engaged in such a legal process that he almost became penniless. Under these circumstances the poor peasantry of united provinces learnt to organize itself. It emerged as a potentially revolutionary class, ready to attack feudal privilege. The Kisan Sabha and Aika movements were the manifestations of its political consciousness. The
peasant organizations were distinct in their origin, approach, methods and programme. There organizations could be categorized as-

(1) Those initiated by the peasants and the rural proletariat and

(2) Those imposed on the peasantry by the urban leadership.

The Kisan Sabhas launched by the anti feudal peasant leaders such as Thakur Singh, Suraj Prasad, Brijpal Singh and Madari Pasi along with the Rure Kisan Sabha belonged to the first category. The Kisan Sabhas led by the Malaviya and Moti Lal Nehru came under the second category. The Oudh Kisan Sabha was dominated by the City leadership which had little interest in Peasant Problems. One more type of peasant resistance which is called social banditry in which the peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes even leaders of liberation found universally in societies based an agriculture, social banditry. These types of resistance flourished in remote and inaccessible areas and in times of economic crises. These resistances have narrow goals are reformative in spirit, not revolutionary. During the economic crises of in India; prices were hiked and people campaigned no rent and resisted against the land laws seems to have the same character mentioned in above lines.

Liberal reformist agitation was one more form of agitation in which involved violation of a specific law, only as a symbolic protest; it does not question the very structure of the legitimate authority nor does it aim at any fundamental transformation in social relations. The Gandhian agrarian movements, whether in Champaran, Kheda and Bardoli or those in the U.P.,
first in 1921 and later in 1930-2, belonged to the liberal reformist agitation. Gandhi’s nations of Swaraj, Ram Rajya or Gram Rajya did imply a utopia in which he sought to combine traditional values with the new political culture and aspirations of the masses.

The U.P. disturbances sometimes started as social banditry and liberal reformist but became the peasant terrorism; the very common form of agitation has little or no organization behind it. Such terrorist activities are aimed at land lords, money lenders or officials who personify the government at the local levels. Karl Marx had observed that urban proletariat is the natural ally of the peasantry in a revolutionary struggle, but the former class did not exist in the United Provinces. Even in industrial centers like Kanpur, Bombay and Ahmedabad, the urban proletariat was not fully conscious of the revolutionary potential about which Karl Max had referred.

For instance the Oudh peasantry which was unfamiliar with modern methods of organization sought out a skilled a leadership to guide them for its movements and agitations. As a result the urban leaders kept the peasant movement in leash, as much as they used the peasant discontent in furthering their own class interests rather then furthering the interests of the peasantry. In this regard Baba Ram Chandra Persuaded the urban leaders from Allahabad to visit the countryside but later he realized the ambiguous role of the urban politicians and expressed his anger against them. The dilemma for Ram Chandra was quite real for in the absence of proletariat leadership he had no alternative but to look upon the urban politicians to educate the peasants for guidance.
A distinctive feature in the peasant movement was the local rural leadership; whose true character was misunderstood because the Britisher created a biased picture in their archival records. Under the colonial rule they were termed as bad characters, trouble makers, criminals, robbers, bandits or absconding offenders. And after 1917 the term “Bolshevik” was used to these terms and in the rural protest the all those terms were drawn immediately with what was happening in Russia.

The revolutionary rural leaders have been dubbed sometimes as men who take advantage of a society’s ills, social bandits or persons belonging to criminal tribes. In the colonial reports Thakur Din Singh was an “Ex-convict” Baba Janki Das was on “absconding offender” Suraj Prasad was a “bad character” and Madari Pasi was a “Criminal”. But actually these were the rural revolutionaries and had a proper plan in peasant resistance against feudal exploitation. The government and the taluqdari authorities virtually ceased to exist in the eight villages where Thakur Din led the peasant upsurge.

Suraj Prasad denounced the entry of policemen and karindas in his areas of operation and even arrested policemen on patrol duty. He abolished all zamindari rights, reinstated evicted tenants in their holdings and fined government servants and pensioners. Several thousand peasants assembled at his meetings. Madari Pasi who led the Aika movement experienced great reverence by the peasantry.

Whenever the Kisan Sabha movement spread it established its authority and control over large area. Swaraj could be seen in many villages
with the rural revolutionaries taking over the village administration and appointing officials from among them. In the reassessment regarding identification of the sections of the peasantry that participated in or direct of the Kisan Sabha an Aika movement some social scientists find that political mobilization was always carried out by the rich peasants; whereas the poor peasants were initially the least militant class of the peasantry.

The middle peasants were always responsible for building up anti landlord and anti rich peasant sentiments. So far as middle peasants were concerned, in Oudh we find that there were no middle peasants in the region. In this taluqdari region the peasantry had no “secure access” to land as the right of ownership vested in the taluqdar. Only 2.1 percent tenants had a right of occupancy in the holdings and the remaining 97.9 percent were merely tenant-at-will with seven-year leases till 1922.

The land lords had power to evict the tenant, even before the expiry of his lease and this made the tenant more and more dependent on him. So the Oudh peasants were the poor peasants who were always exploited by the land lords. And among these tenants we can classify them on the basis of rent paid. This classification was on the basis rent for it indicates the economic status of the tenant and his size of holding. For instance the rich tenant peasants were those peasants who paid Rs. 100 or more as a rent and the size of his holdings would be around 10 acres and he would be depending on hired labour to maintain his holdings. Such tenants were 2.9% of the total tenantry in Oudh. All such tenants who paid Rs. 50 as rent and his holdings would be between five to ten acres which he could maintain either by hiring few labourers or with the help of his family. We place him
in the category of middle peasants and the percentage of such tenants 11.3 in Oudh. A tenant who paid between Rs. 22 and Rs. 49 had very little or no funds and his holdings between 2 to 5 acres, and he was not in position to hire labour. We place in him in the category of poor peasants and their percentage was 22.9 in Oudh.

In this economic society, innumerable were the ways in which the taluqdars tormented their tenant peasants some of which have already been detailed earlier. The taluqdars used to spend their days in frivolous amusements and many a tale are current about the sordid affairs of their character. But since they had approaches to the higher officers, they generally escaped punishment.

The taluqdars in Oudh had an association of their own which existed after independence and its admission or membership is generally governed by the right of Primogeniture, that only exception being the estate of Maurawan, where every son is entitled to be so. This forum was used to voice their grievances often in cases when government tried to enact laws for marginal benefits to tenants. The British Government had favoured this class in many other ways also, for instance Taluqdars were allotted spacious accommodations for ever in the historic buildings of Kaisarbagh.

Secure in their position, the taluqdars levied numerons types of taxes beside the revenue dues. Even if a tenant died, his successor had to pay a suitable nazrana to get land again for agricultural purpose. In this way tenants had to grease the palms of the Karindas (agents), Patwari, The
Kanungo, The Naib and The Senior Tahsildar, who too demanded their pound of flesh for mutation purpose.

Taluqdars seldom made any sessions efforts to help the tenant in improving their agriculture. Even if a tenant wanted to dig a well he had to take permission from them. Ponds and the tanks were the taluqdars property. Peasants had to pay irrigation charges. The interests of the tenants were neglected.

The Mont-Ford reforms of 1919 did little to alleviate the sufferings of the tenants of Awadh. The Provincial legislative councils were dominated mostly by the moneybags and the taluqdars who vested interests clashed with those of the tenants and as such, there was little hope for their redemption. Further, since pressure on the land was increasing with the growth of population, the taluqdars made immense money by leasing out the land to those who could bid highest on Pattas or writs of ownership under certain conditions.

As a result many landless people from Awadh got themselves recruited as labourers and were dispatched by the British to their colonies in Africa, Fiji and the West Indies. During the first world war the taluqdars not only contributed monetarily but also amulated the princely states encouraging able-bodied persons to be enlisted in the army. And the test of loyalty of a taluqdar was number of recruits he supplied. Those who enlisted themselves to serve literally as cannon fodders in foreign lands for the British were exempted from minor harassments.
The patience of the Awadh peasantry was exhausted and it dreamt of redemption from the tyrannies of the taluqdaars. They found a champion of their cause in Baba Ram Chandra. The Kisan Sabha and the Eka movement were the natural outcomes their remonstrative instincts while they were benefited politically by historic visit of J.L.Nehru. The complete forces and peculiar historical conditions shaped the form and substance of peasant resistance. It is, of course true that none of the peasant movements and revolts culminated in a full-fledged revolution. In this regard social scientist regard that lack of revolutionary experience in India or the traditionally docile character of the Indian peasant and also the peculiarities of the village social structure built on atmosphere to weaken the rebellions impulse of the peasantry.

Some social scientist believe that from this caste structure on several occasions some subordinate sections of the rural society who came to feel injustice of their lot, did burst through and a variety of peasant movements developed, particularly between 1920 and 1950. But the fact is that neither their broad perspective nor their sources on India permitted them to undertake a more thorough historical survey of peasant resistance in India. They could not therefore examine or assess the relative potential of different strata of the agrarian society and their contribution to peasant revolts; although agrarian discontent and grievances pervaded in different degrees almost all parts of the country and U.P. as well.

We would argue that the limitations of peasant struggles seem to have sprung more from broader political forces at the regional as well as all India level and from the colonial status of the country’s polity and economy,
rather than either any inherent passively of the village social structure as the social scientist Barriagton Moore suggest. The next issue that needs to be examined in a comparative study relates to the class character of peasant resistance and to the revolutionary potential of different agrarian classes in U.P.

In this regard our study suggests two broad patterns of interdependence between the type of revolt or movement, and strata of peasantry. First the millenarian and insurrectionary movements, the principal participants are invariably the poor peasant, tenants-at-will with small holdings and share-croppers (i.e. there were the subcategories of the peasantry) and landless labourers. The Jacquerie type agrarian disturbances in the U.P. in 1920-21 were largely the creation of the lower tenantry (tenants-at-will) from lower castes such as Ahirs, Kurmis, Pasis and Chamars. There methods of agitation finds similarities with Moplah poor peasantry.

Ideologically; however these movements despite the same class base, showed different tendencies. The Moplah rising and outbreaks of the U.P. tenantry around 1920-21 more essentially pre-political phenomena with dominant religious or millenarian overtones; whereas the Tebhaga and Telangama were the product of a consciously adopted revolutionary ideology and strategic outcome of C.P.I.

Secondly, the resistance of the middle and rich peasants, either against the government or their landlords, has taken a qualitatively different form. The no rent campaign in U.P. in 1930-32, it was mainly the rich and middle
peasants who responded to Gandhi’s political agitations, adopted his ethic of non-violence as a creed and suffered repression quietly.

Such patterns raise two enter related questions; what has been the role of the middle peasants in revolutionary or near revolutionary movements; and how did the alliances of the class work effectively in peasant resistance and revolt. Looking into the facts of peasant resistance and revolt during the period 1920-50, it appears that middle peasants did not perform the crucial role. The middle peasants had not made any outstanding contribution to rebellions and mass insurrections.

In terms of economic interests and political aspirations, they have been nearer rich peasants and always restorted liberal reformist agitational methods which explain why almost always, they readily responded to the Gandhian movements, in the broader from work of the anti-imperialist national liberation movement.

Such movements developed in structurally different settings. In the Oudh districts (1930-20) no rent campaign in U.P. which were land lord tenant areas, the principal participants in the agrarian movements came from substantial land owners and self sufficient cultivators, whether land holders or tenants i.e. the rich and middle peasants. On the contrary the poor peasants and landless labourers in India not only formed an overwhelmingly large section of the rural society but have also demonstrated their transformative potential from time to time. Though it in time that their potentially have not been very articulate in times of ideology, method and
organization. It reflects that they were lacking leadership and organizational abilities.

The second question refers to the nature, extent and effectiveness of the class alliance in Indian Peasant Movement. It has always been difficult in India to unite the rich, middle and poor peasants and landless labourers in a concerted struggle, because the agrarian social structure has not been conducive to genuine class alliances. When an alliance did take place, it either manifested itself in liberal-reformist agitation.

In the case of Oudh region, the poor peasantry acted independently in the 1920-21 upsurge of social banditry. But the no rent campaign of 1930 in the U.P. brought disparate social elements on the agitation platform. Both rich and middle peasants, badly affected by the depression, coalesced with the section of the urban middle class, even poor tenants and landless labourers also joined the “no rent” struggle. The multi-class character of the “no rent” campaign thus stemmed from the class composition of the congress itself.

So, we draw the conclusion about the leadership of peasant movement that peasants have to have leaders from other (non-peasant) classes. In this way urban middle class professionals and the intelligentsia and the politically discontented have been the primary source of leadership in almost all the struggles; because direction and organization of strategy and tactics has often come from the other classes, including sometimes the rich peasants.
Certain pattern and historical situation like growth of commercial agriculture and transition from a consumption-oriented economy to a cash or market economy in the countryside also led to the peasants movements, for instance Malabar, Gujarat, Bengal or Telangana all had undergone this transition and the cultivation of market/export crops had come to dominate the rural economies in the regions. This does not apply strictly to the Oudh districts, but political factors have played an important role in arousing political consciousness in this area.

In India peasant movements or the agrarian discontent had always manifested itself in one form or another coinciding with sudden fluctuations in prices. During the period 1920-50, there were three main periods in which most of the peasant revolts and agrarian agitations took place. (1) 1920-22 (2) 1928-32 and (3) 1945-50. Each period witnessed a major economic transition, or crises. The first and the third were the periods often world wars, witnessed the price hike and food shortage. And the second period was the period of economic depression. The more violent and insurrectionary movement of rural poor developed during the economic crisis of 1920-22 and 1945-50 whereas during the depression the peasant mobilization of the rich and middle peasants were on the liberal reformist lines. Violent peasant revolts had occurred mainly in the zamindari areas; and it was also noticed that peasant who socially inferior among Hindus were more prone to rise in revolt against the established order. It was the peripheral group lying outside the caste Hindu system; although they had functional relations with the superior class. Ahirs and Kurmirs of the Oudh districts were more prone to rise in revolt.
The politicization of peasants seems to weaken the revolutionary impulse for instance the patidors of Gujarat and Kamna peasantry of the Andhra delta. The former organised under Gandhian system and latter turned to communist. But politicization of the peasantry led always to the congress model liberal reformism. The peasantry of U.P. also was mobilized better from 1920 onwards both by right and left wing organization, peasant resistance there took the liberal-reformist agitational form at least till 1950; with the exception of the agrarian agitations in Oudh in 1920-21.

During our study it was also noticed that the 1936 congress socialist party meeting paved way to the radical changes in the pace of movement; where A.I.K.S. meeting was called. Swami Sahajanad Saraswati demanded the peasant’s actual demands and absolute economic and political freedom was asked and resolution was passed. And in the same year congress manifesto was declared which led the congress party to take proper advantage or exploit the peasants for their own political movements.

It is fact that Kisan Sabhas had played a vital role in the struggles of peasants and always motivated the poor peasant to achieve the political and economic rights. Balia, Basti, Johnpur and Allahabad experienced the great resistance of the Kisan Sabhas demanding against the local grievances and national level problems of the peasants; which ultimately led to the tenancy reforms of the congress government in 1939 and later abolishment of the zamindari system. After 1942 owing to the political differences A.I.K.S. could not hold Swami Shajanand Saraswati, because C.P.I. had captured A.I.K.S. organization completely by 1944-45.
Swami Sahajanand Saraswati himself with the congress left-wingers and with the congress socialist worked for the peasants and which led to the formation of a new. All India United Kisan Sabha, though the All India United Kisan Sabha did have a few strong holds in U.P. Over all peasants resistance was full of many ideologies such as Gandhian fabianism, Communists agenda and social reformist; at the same time the common peasant was unaware of their political demands and they were always unorganized and under the influence of the outer political leaders who were the national leaders and had national level demands against the British. The nationalist political movements for liberation such as the non-cooperation (1920-22) and civil disobedience (1930-32) movement took the peasant discontent for their own uses.

If we look into the matter of the achievements of the peasant revolts in U.P., each of the movements was followed by some legislative or ameliorative measure. Some legal reforms took place, some modification in the structure of land control, always followed peasant resistance until the era of progressive land reforms began in India around 1949-50 most of these measures consisted only of minor adjustments in the social arrangements on land. They restored the balance, keeping the existing system going and did not involve any drastic changes redistribution of economic power and privilege.

It is hard to say that peasant movements contributed to the complete restructuring of the social order in relations to land because the peasantry was not prepared for that change; besides the leadership of the peasantry also did not provide their proper guidance for the radical changes in the land
tenure system. The achievement of the peasant revolt in Uttar Pradesh if viewed in the context of their proximate aims, are very impressive. Each of the movements that we have examined was followed some legislative or ameliorative measure. Some legal reforms some modification in the structure of land control always followed peasant resistance. Until the new era of progressive land reforms began in India around 1949-50, most of these measures consisted only of minor adjustments in the social arrangements on land. They did not change the existing system and did not even involve any drastic changes such as redistribution of economic power and privilege.

Thus, when the British left India had become a much more village-based agricultural economy than it had been earlier; and it all was done by the policies of Indian National Congress, by investing in irrigation, agro research, agro modernization and mechanization.
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