CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSION

There was nothing in Gandhi's background, personal or public which could be clearly identified with the peasantry or the agrarian life when he returned from South Africa. In South Africa his public life was confined to motley groups which were not peasantry in any case, except a sprinkling of Patidars from the Western India. On his return to India, Gandhi was face to face with a 'Peasant India'. From the beginning of his public life in India, Gandhi started working against imperialism by rallying all social forces into a united front. His endeavour demanded the integration of the peasantry, especially, into the proposed anti-imperialist united front of all classes. Hence, Gandhi had to win over the total confidence of the peasantry. Gandhi was not a peasant revolutionary and thus his ideas and approaches were accordingly not geared up towards such a platform. Throughout, he was a peasant mobilizer against British imperialism and he sought to give India a new political order based on his time tested techniques of ahimsa.

2. Ibid., pp. 24-29.
and Satyagraha.

The peasant mobilization in India was not an easy task as it was fraught with inherent contradictions regarding class relationships on the agrarian scene. However, it is significant to note that Gandhi in his struggle against imperialism not only succeeded in mobilizing the peasantry but managed to dilute the class struggle on the agrarian front to some extent. It was Gandhi who was singularly successful in mobilizing the exploited peasantry and the other aggrieved agrarian classes on the one hand and the vested interests on the agrarian scene like the Zamindars, the landlords, the absentee landlords, the moneylenders, the rich peasants etc. on the other hand. Despite complexities of the peasant relations, Gandhi sailed through his manoeuvres and remained consistent to his 'larger goal' but at the same time without, in any way, imparting his credibility to the impoverished peasantry.

Gandhi's whole approach towards the peasantry and various agrarian issues was in accordance with his effort to evolve a broad anti-imperialist perspective. This policy had started developing since the Champaran days. In Champaran, though the Satyagraha was directly against the planters, and the agents of the British Raj, the anti-imperialistic outlook was developing fast. In his overweening enthusiasm for the primary


contradiction against imperialism, due to political exigencies, Gandhi down-played the secondary or internal contradictions, which had been vitiating the atmosphere of Bihar in general and Champaran in particular. This approach and the policy of Gandhi towards the peasantry was again evident in Kheda, the United Provinces, Malabar, Bengal, Bardoli etc. This approach was especially quite clear and explicit in Gandhi's policy towards the Kisans and their agitations in the United Provinces, where the Kisans had started becoming conscious and taken to autonomous self-mobilization.

With his policy of integrating the peasantry - all sections of them, Gandhi tended to overlook the real problems of the peasants and emphasized on 'trusteeship' and 'social harmony'. Peasantry's integration was sought to be achieved without any substantial socio-economic changes. Gandhi had his own ways to bringing about socio-economic changes and that was through his constructive programme, which could hardly bring any transformation in the socio-economic conditions of the poor peasants. The main motive working behind the constructive programmes was to blunt the rising class conflict and contradictions on the rural scene.

Another crucial aspect of Gandhian nationalism, which is evident from the study, is that in order to harness all social forces against imperialism, Gandhi was always for 'a controlled mass movement'. In pursuance of this, he was helped by his non-violent Satyagraha technique. This idea of 'controlled
mass movement' and its concrete techniques developed during the Kheda Satyagraha through his emphasis on 'Satyagraha pledge', which later became a regular feature in Gandhian movement. Through this Gandhi's effort was to bind the diverse social forces in a unidimensional move. And whenever the peasantry or the masses tended to get out of the pre-determined bounds, threatening his broad united strategy, he never hesitated to apply the 'brake' in his hand.

It is also evident from the study that there was nothing particularly non-violent about the rural classes which adopted Gandhi's technique in order to further their economic interests. The rural classes of India which followed Gandhi were, infact, not so turbulent classes, and they chose to follow Gandhi because his methods appeared eminently practical. Moreover, even the conscious unleashing of the movement by Gandhi did raise the consciousness of the peasants and they started viewing their problems in a wider nationalistic perspective. This is evident in the cases of Kisan Sabha and Eka Movement of the United provinces. Another example of such an independent movement is Alluri Sitaram Raju's movement in Andhra Pradesh.

These movements were largely independent of Gandhian influence and the local leaders had their own ambitions. However, in order to mobilize the masses, the name of Gandhi was frequently used, putting aside his ideology.

During the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928, the Gandhian game of power politics was apparent once again. Here in Bardoli the
the victory benefited the rich and the middle class peasants and it did not touch the core of the peasant question - the question of abolishing landlordism altogether. Even then, the lower strata of the peasantry rallied behind the movement. The religio-cultural ideas, 'loyalty to one's community-caste and also devotion to one's duty' played a significant part in achieving the class alliance. It must, however, be pointed out that the Gandhi-styled 'constructive activities' were also able to create an atmosphere of trust among the otherwise antagonistic classes. But in the end the poor peasants' lot remained the same under the feudal and the semi-feudal land relations which were barely touched by Gandhi or his followers.

However, between the peasant struggles in the United Provinces in 1920-1921 and again in 1930-1931 and those led by Gandhi and the Gandhians in Champaran, Kheda and Bardoli, there were some apparent differences. Except 'Champaran', which was more a political legend and less an agrarian movement (and hence a type by itself), all other movements led by either Gandhi himself or by Vallabhbhai Patel and other true believers of non-violence were launched in non-zamindari areas, where the tussle was direct between the peasant proprietors and the Government. In such a structural setting, the agrarian agitations took up the minor and even the superficial issues like reduction in revenue, principles of land resettlement and

so on and were not aimed at bringing about any fundamental changes in the structure of land control. Moreover, such agitations were led or encouraged by the Gandhians simply because the campaigns of this kind did not mitigate the Congress anti-imperialist struggle, nor did they arouse political consciousness along class lines.

On the contrary, in the United Provinces and particularly in Oudh, the agrarian social structure was marked with severe contradictions. It was a zamindari (landlord-tenant) area. In order to gain the political advantage, the leaders were expected to criticize the feudal and the exploitative character of the agrarian structure, the landlords' oppression, illegal exactions and eviction of the tenants. Had the Congress kept quiet about such exploitations during the period of agrarian crises, it would have surely been alienated by the tenants. Nehru's and the left wing's pronouncement of the radical ideology and programme can be understood in this particular context. It was not so much out of any personal predilections as out of the structural constraints within which the leaders of the United Provinces had to operate in 1930-1932 that the Congress 'left wing' turned radical. This radicalism was confined only to vocal ideological pronouncements. Infact, the 'left wing' could not afford to lose Gandhi's moral support. Hence the class conflict that its idiom and campaign were likely to arouse had to be toned down.

The mobilization among the peasants was carried on by touching their economic grievances, the solution to which lay
in fighting for and achieving Swaraj. The demands put forward by the Congress under the leadership of Gandhi related to a variety of economic issues. But the peasant was always absent from these demands, except by way of reference to reduction in land revenue; and that incidentally, would have affected only the ryotwari regions. The demands were calculated more to benefit the trading community, the capitalists and the other dominant sections of the Indian society. On the other hand, the peasants on their own attached their economic grievances to the political issues, and this alarmed Gandhi. The peasant pressure for including the no-rent demand was a contributory factor in the hasty retreat of the Congress struggles in 1922 and 1931 under the leadership of Gandhi.

During the period of economic crisis of 1929-1933, the organized peasant movement began to work out its own agrarian programme. In Andhra in 1929, the Provincial Ryots Conference advanced a demand for the abolition of the feudal landlord system. Such instances were, however, very rare. This period was also important for the advance in the social and national consciousness of the Indian peasants. If under the influence of feudal ideology, they had earlier not realized the causes of their misery and poverty, they now recognised the necessity of their struggle against imperialism and the victory over it as a pre-condition for their deliverance from their present condition.
Simultaneously with the rise of a general national consciousness among the peasants, a sharpening of contradictions in the multi-class anti-imperialist front brought about a feeling in them (peasants) that the nationalist leadership was not consistently fighting against imperialism and that it did not support the economic demands of the peasants. As a result of the activities of a small number of communists and the representatives of the petty bourgeois ideological trends composing the left wing of the national liberation movement, an organised peasant movement appeared in a rudimentary form by the middle of the thirties.

Similarly, the growth of the Congress Socialist Party after 1934 and its role within the Congress and among the peasantry, were due to the increasing importance of the socio-economic objectives for the nationalistic cause. The Congress Socialists were not welcomed by the moderate leadership and Gandhi viewed their rise as a cause for his resignation. But the Congress Socialists secured the position of prominence in the Congress and the Congress platform came to include the elements of the thinking inspired by the socialists. Alongside the Congress, and under the tutelage of its Socialist Party group, the Kisan Sabhas grew up after 1935, later culminating into the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha in 1936. This

7. Spontaneously in the beginning in the form of outgrowth of the mass peasant movement beyond the ideological and organisational framework fixed by the party of the national bourgeoisie and later consciously through organised actions under individual members of bourgeoisie who fought not only against imperialism but also in defence of the demand of all the toilers including the peasants.
development again reflected the growing importance of the agrarian problem and of the Kisan participation in the nationalist movement. It also indicated the implicit split between the Congress under the leadership of Gandhi as a multi-interest nationalist political party and the Kisan Sabhas as an expression of the specifically agrarian discontent.

The importance of the agrarian problems, which after 1931 may fairly be called the constituents of the agrarian crisis, was also reflected in the Congress party in 1935 and 1936 that resulted in the enunciation of the election manifesto and the agrarian programme. Here the fact can not be ignored that the Congress recognized the importance of socio-economic amelioration in order to secure mass support for a political struggle. It was a realization on the part of the Congress that it needed an agrarian programme for mass support and votes.

However, in forming the agrarian programme, the guidance was sought from the Gandhian traditions, which favoured social harmony, self-help and non-violence. In so far as it was possible, the Congress leadership tended to select its frame of reference from these very traditions. This tradition in turn moulded its response to the views and programmes of Kisan leaders. Seen from this light, the Congress agrarian programme was itself the product of interaction in a developing situation. The elements of this interaction also produced a compromise. Apparently, however, the compromise achieved was not really
satisfactory to the various interest groups involved. The left wing thought it too hesitant whereas Gandhi and his core group viewed it with alarm.

It has been mentioned how peasants' votes contributed to the Congress victory in the elections of 1937. But once in office, the Congress did not fulfil its agrarian programmes, rather the Congress ministry frequently violated the aspects of its programme. Of course a few mildly ameliorative 'self help' measures were taken up to improve the agrarian conditions. It is noteworthy to point out that the Gandhian viewpoint of harmony of interests prevailed in the views and voting of the Congress representations in office. Simultaneously, it has been noted that the Congress right wing, which was under the direct influence of Gandhi, irritated the provincial Congress leaders by its willingness to accommodate the Congress programme to the views of such groups as those of the landlords. Infact, the right wing Congress leadership, reflecting the structure and goals of the Congress Party compromised its electoral promises and failed to fulfil them. The various peasant movements, which developed in the various regions after 1937 under the provincial Kisan Sabhas, remained confined only as regional outgrowths. It is noted that whether those were the dissenting voices of the leaders like Sahajanand or the left out-cry for corrective steps in peasant actions based on a class struggle, all remained marginalised on the national scene. It is clear that despite the growing independent Kisan
movements, the whole scene was dominated by Gandhi and his core group as far as the Congress policies were concerned.

During the Individual Satyagraha Movement, it was again the question of channelising the peasants' anger which remained foremost in Gandhi's mind.

The Quit India Movement of 1942 was like the movements of 1920s and 1930s, a non-violent movement under the leadership of Gandhi, yet it was materially different from earlier movements. While the earlier movements were in the nature of preparatory training for a final struggle, the movement of 1942 was, in itself, the final struggle in for making a supreme sacrifice to achieve freedom. Its objective was 'independence vow', its motto 'do or die', and its slogan - 'Karenga ya Marenge' (we shall do or die). The movement was intended to be "a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale". However, it is established that Gandhi was no longer so obsessed with non-violence as he was during the preceding few years. He was prepared to risk violence as the price of freedom. So cataclysmic did he feel the times to be. However he never intended or even expected the movement to be violent. "I am the same Gandhi", said he on August 7, 1942, "as I was in 1920 ... I attach the same importance to non-violence that I did then". Similarly, all the responsible Congress leaders -

8. All India Congress Committee Resolution, August 8, 1942. Gandhi's Correspondence with the Government 1942-1944, p. 277
Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Azad etc; in their speeches at the Bombay All India Congress Committee referred to the movement as a non-violent struggle. The Bombay resolution itself repeated "non-violence" three times and asked the people to "remember that non-violence is the basis of the movement". But the movement could not remain non-violent in the traditional manner. There was much violence against property and life. The implications of 'Do or Die' were clear.

The Quit India Movement lasted till May 1944. During the movement, Gandhi was behind the bars and he could not frame any articulate policy towards peasants' actions, though throughout, he stressed the peasant to be non-violent in their actions.

The narrative presented in the study brings to light a few facts on which it stands. First, Gandhi, despite his realization of difficulties and problems of the peasantry was against class conflict in any form, and thus fought for the maintenance of class harmony of different social sections, often, with antagonistic ethos, for the sake of national united front of all classes in the struggle for Swaraj. Hence his attitude and policy towards the peasants movement was basically anti-imperialistic and he tried to harness the growing radicalisation of the peasant consciousness into the broad movement against imperialism. That is why he always tried to interlink

12. *All India Congress Committee Resolution*, August 8, 1942.
the peasant problems with the nationalistic movement, and thereby roused their political consciousness, but he always wanted the peasantry as a force in the national movement to be under the hegemony of the nationalist leadership with a subordinate position. Another point which comes to light is that Gandhi, practically on all occasions compromised with Zamindars etc. He always tried to balance the contradictions emerging out of the relations of the peasantry with the Zamindars, landlords etc. It was again the idea of primary contradictions with imperialism which led Gandhi to a slur over the internal contradictions. The same motive again led Gandhi to smoothen this period's intra-party conflicts which were arising due to the ideological differences among the leaders within the Congress. However, contrary to the wishes of Gandhi, the peasant interests were clear and strong. The peasant leadership had begun to emerge at the grass root level during the period under study.

Hence the assumptions as stated in earlier paragraphs have been tested and found correct in the period of our study. The evolution of Gandhian response to the peasantry has been discussed in detail in the first chapter. This chapter highlights the fact that the peasantry was a simple cohesive social group, whose interests could best be served not as a pressure group but as a part of the national movement's basic constituent. The success Gandhi achieved in Champaran, followed by Kheda as also the response of Gandhi to Guntur agitation, Moplah agitation,
Non-Cooperation Movement and the first phase of the peasant movement in the United Provinces convinced Gandhi that the peasants' newly found power should be used for the united anti-imperialistic movement. Further, the chapter also deals with Gandhi's anti-landlord policies and ideologies in mute forms which have been best expressed in the Bardoli resolution of 1922.¹³

In the second chapter the Eka movement has been discussed, with the emphasis that Gandhi was never for a no-rent agitation which was directly against the landed vested interests. The second important movement which has been discussed in this chapter is Alluri Sitaram Raju's uprising in Andhra Pradesh. Though the movement was anti-imperialist, but Gandhi did not support it due to the overdose of violence.

In the third chapter on Bardoli Movement, some contradictions do appear. For instance, where Gandhi was against the no-rent movement in the United Provinces etc., he was willing to go ahead with no-revenue campaign in the ryotwari region of Gujarat such as Bardoli. Perhaps it was because of the fact that the struggle was directly between the peasant proprietors and the Government. Significantly here also he was leading the peasants on the issues which were basically minor, or even superficial like reduction in revenue, principles of land resettlement etc.

¹³ For details of the Bardoli Resolution see chapter I, p. 69.
The Bardoli struggle largely voiced the grievances of the dominant sections. It further waged the question of an arbitrary system of the land revenue which was the chief base of the British power not only in Bardoli but in the rural India also. Gandhi also tested the efficacy of non-violence in Bardoli campaign. The response of the Bardoli peasantry encouraged Gandhi to exploit it further on all India basis, which has been discussed in chapter fourth titled; 'Gandhi and the Peasant Movement, 1926-1936'.

The anti Zamindar instance of the peasantry during this period, once again came for a criticism from the Congress. The chapter fifth, 'Gandhi and the Peasant Movement, 1937-1946', discusses the pressure on Gandhi from the peasant agitation as such. The immediate demands of the peasants were taken up by the Congress in preparation for the elections of 1937. However, the Congress soon realized that it will be better for itself to go slow, as the anti-landlord demands of the peasantry might throw the landlords into the lap of imperialism.

The Dandi March, the Individual Satyagraha Movement, the Quit India Movement of 1942 which continued upto 1945 were viewed as retrospective by the Congress in that perspective, though occasionally the anti-landlord statements were made by Gandhi and the Congress to assuage the hurt feelings of the peasantry.

The above details have been once again reviewed in chapter sixth on 'Gandhi's mind and technique' which highlights
the basic features of the Gandhian response to the peasant movements. In short, the contradictions between the peasant nationalism and the Gandhian attitude towards the peasantry have been highlighted and it has been concluded that in the given scenario in which Gandhi was operating, it was perhaps the best possible alternative for the peasantry. Here the opinion of the peasant leaders as well as the scholars dealing with the peasant nationalism might differ. Their opinion, however, had its own logic which need full appreciation. But Gandhi was no peasant leader in a narrow sense, but an all India leader, whose responsibility was to overthrow the British Raj through non-violence and mass mobilization. As such Gandhi had to make compromises even when he was apparently convinced about the peasant cause and the exploitation which they had to undergo by the landlords and the vested interest.