The object of the present study "Gandhi and the Indian Peasant Movement, 1922-1946", is to examine and critically assess the rise and growth of various peasant movements in India and Gandhi's attitude towards these agrarian movements during the period from 1922 to 1946. These two dates are important as from 1922, the peasant unrest started showing the signs of uptide. The year 1946 is a turning point for the peasant movement as there was a discernible change for more militancy and tilt towards the left. The high points were the Tebhanga Movement and Telangana Movement which sharply differed in nature and technique from the movements of the past.

The historians of Indian nationalism have been emphasising for some time the need of micro-studies. In the recent years, there are also signs of a shift away from earlier preoccupations with national or regional leaders, patriotic ideologies, elite ambitions or factional manoeuvres of patron-client linkage, towards something like 'history from below' stressing the role of a popular initiative. Hence, the concept of people's history has pushed the peasant studies into the forefront. The initiative on the part of the peasantry in resisting the British authority as well as the local allies of British imperialism i.e., Zamindars, is a subject which has been noticed by a few scholars and needs to be further investigated.
No doubt, there had been sporadic attempts to discuss the history of various peasant revolts in the 19th and early 20th century by scholars and their works such as Dr. D. N. Dhanagare's 'Agrarian Movements in India, 1920-1950' (Oxford, 1983); Sukhbir Chaudhary's 'Peasants and Workers Movement in India' (Delhi, 1977); Ranjit Guha's 'Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India' (Delhi, 1983); Sunil Sen's 'Peasant Movements in India: mid 19th and early 20th Century' (Calcutta 1982); Kapil Kumar's 'Peasants in Revolt: Tenant, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh, 1886-1922' (New Delhi, 1984), etc., but there was not much work available to reveal Gandhi's attitude, his mind and technique towards various agrarian movements which took place from 1922 to 1946.

In the mid 19th and early 20th century, peasant revolts flared up in the various parts of the country; these revolts though intermittent and spasmodic, reflected peasant discontent that was growing in zamindari as well as ryotwari areas. It would be fatuous to ignore the sweep and intensity of the peasant revolts that developed in the wake of nationalist movement in India. Though the Congress represented the most progressive force of the country, its early leaders did not go beyond the demands of minor reforms. It was in the Gandhian era that the Congress embarked upon peasant mobilization. Gandhi did not fail to perceive the crucial importance of peasant mobilization in an overwhelmingly peasant country. With the purpose of bringing peasant masses into the mid streams of
national movement and thus raising the numerical strength of the Congress, Gandhi led the Champaran and Kheda Satyagraha. And once the path of the peasant mobilization was taken, it was difficult to halt.

The present study tends to discover the circumstances for the emergences of various peasant movements during the period, the character of the unrest, the nature of feudal excesses, the ideologies that gave strength and guidance to them, the part they played in India's freedom movement, Gandhi's activities among peasants, his attitude and technique towards these movements and also the peasants' outlook towards Gandhian technique. Gandhi seems an obvious choice because so much has been made of his ability to appeal to India's 'rural masses' and involve them in anti-imperialist movements. As such an endeavour has also been made to reveal how the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhi acquired roots in the rural areas and developed its base to give direction to the peasant struggles in a particular manner.

The whole thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter represents the historical background of the agrarian movements before 1922. Since this study is concerned with Mahatma Gandhi and the peasant movements between 1922 to 1946, it is theoretically useful to discuss, in the background, the various peasant movements which occurred only after the advent of Gandhi on Indian political scene and prior to 1922. To make it convenient for historical analysis, I have categorised
the movements which took place between 1917 to 1922, into two parts. First, the movements in which Gandhi was directly and personally involved like Champaran and Kheda. And secondly, certain other peasant movements like Kisan Sabha movement in the United Provinces, Moplah revolt in Malabar, no-tax campaign in Gantur during this period, where Gandhi, though not directly involved, had definite policy and approach. The chapter throws a light on the nature of exploitation, the conditions of peasantry, Gandhi's attitude towards the peasant problems and the causes which compelled him to launch Champaran and Kheda movements. It also uncovers the peasants' response towards Gandhi's technique of Satyagraha. The chapter also gives a detailed account of the peasant struggles which were not launched by Gandhi, revealing his policy and approach towards them. It also deals with the issues which prepared peasants to launch their movements under Gandhi or even without him.

The second chapter describes mainly two peasant movements which took place from 1922-1925. In the United Provinces, notably in the district of Hardoi, Kheri, Sitapur and Lucknow, peasant movements came to be known as Eka Movement which was directed against the taluqdars and the Government officials, who used to exploit the peasants by exacting more than what they were really entitled to. The second important movement, during the period, flourished in Andhra Pradesh and was led by Alluri Sitaram Raju, in the agency area of Godavari and Vishakapatnam.
district. At first peasants started asking for the free use of the forest lands and produce. Rapidly their demands went up and they wanted to establish swaraj for the whole of the agency area. The Government adopted a policy of repression towards this violent struggle. In this chapter, an effort has been made to focus the nature of these two movements, the demands made by the peasants, their leadership and the policy of the Government towards the movements.

The third chapter examines, in detail, the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928. The Bardoli movement was a typical example of a successful peasant movement in the ryotwari area under Congress leadership. The reason for the campaign at Bardoli was a decision of the authorities of Bombay Presidency to raise the land revenue by 22 per cent. The fact that the principle class conflict in the ryotwari areas lay between the Government and the peasants as a whole, contributed to the success of the national leadership in organising this struggle. The chapter highlights mainly the social origins of the Bardoli agitation, the nature of political mobilization that preceded the movement, its leadership, its class character and the role played by Gandhi.

In the fourth chapter, the peasant movement from 1926 to 1936, have been taken up. Besides mentioning the formation of various Peasants' and Workers' Parties and their ideologies, the chapter seeks to give a detailed account of the peasant
movements around the country, which started during the Civil Disobedience Movement. In fact, the great depression of 1929-1930 caused a big blow on the Indian peasantry, bringing agricultural prices down to half. On the other hand Government too refused either to scale down its rates of taxation, or to ask the Zamindars to bring down their rents. So, the peasants were placed in a situation that they had to continue to pay taxes, rents and debts at pre-depression rates, while their income continued to spiral steadily downwards. In this atmosphere of discontent, the Civil Disobedience Movement was launched in 1930, and it soon took a form of a no-tax and no-rent campaign in many parts of the country, such as Allahabad and Rae-Bareilly districts of United Provinces, in the Kheda and Surat districts of Gujarat, in certain areas of Bengal, such as Contai, Midnapore; the Tamluk area of Bihar, and some other areas of the North West Frontier Province were equally active. In Bihar and Bengal, powerful movements were launched against the hated chowkidari tax, which the villagers were made to pay for the upkeep of their own oppressors. In Maharashtra, Bihar and the Central Provinces, Forest Satyagraha became popular. The peasants defied the forest law that prohibited them from the use of the forests. Anti-Zamindar struggles also emerged in Andhra during this period. In short, in this chapter, various peasants movements which broke out with the Civil Disobedience Movement in the different parts of the country have been discussed. Gandhi's relationship
with these movements has also been taken up. Consolidation of the left forces and the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha in 1936 is also highlighted. It is also mentioned how Congress under the influence of the All India Kisan Sabha passed the famous Faizpur Agrarian Programme and how Congress consulted Gandhian traditions while passing this agrarian programme?

The fifth chapter deals with those agrarian activities which took place from 1937 to 1946. It is noteworthy that when Congress ministries were formed in 1937, an upsurge of peasant struggles swept over the country for implementing some of the demands inscribed in Faizpur agrarian resolution. Although Congress, on its part, passed a few legislations in this direction, but they could not fulfil the radical peasant demands such as abolition of feudal levies, stopping of eviction of tenants by landlords, reduction of tax, rent and debt burden etc. Failed to fulfil these demands, the State Governments run by Congress not only unleashed massive repression but banned the Congressmen from having any association with the Kisan Sabha. An attempt has been made to discuss at length the contribution of the peasants for the victory of the Congress in the provincial elections of 1937, how far their demands were met by the Congress, what led to the worsening of the relationship between the Kisan Sabha and the right wing Congressite and what were the methods adopted by the Gandhi core group under the leadership of Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel to
check the growing influence of Kisan Sabha and its main leaders.

The other major development during this period was the outbreak of the Second World War which checked the rising tide of peasant awakening. In 1942, during the Quit India Movement, peasants' activities rose up and they played the most heroic, dynamic and effective role. This chapter describes the agrarian causes which led Gandhi to launch Quit India Movement and various other peasant activities during the movement.

The sixth chapter on Gandhi's mind and technique ventures to explore a rather complex issue. It concentrates upon Gandhi's relationship with various peasant activities. Gandhi realized that no anti-imperialist struggle could possibly be launched in India without the involvement of peasants whom the Congress had hitherto ignored. He, therefore, devised a programme for politically mobilizing the rural masses and for drawing them nearer to the Indian national movement. At the same time, despite his realisation of the difficulties and problems of the peasantry, Gandhi was against class conflict in any form, and thus fought for the maintenance of class harmony of different social sections, often with antagonistic goals for the sake of forming a united national front involving all classes in the struggle for Swaraj. Hence, Gandhi avoided committing himself, beyond the limit of his goal of forming a united front, to the objectives of militant, social and economic reconstruction of the peasantry. This was because of the fact that he feared
it would antagonise the national front of all classes. He was afraid that any radicalism would violate his political ethic of non-violent struggle. Gandhi's attitude and policy towards peasant movements was anti-imperialist and he wanted to harness the growing radicalisation of the peasant consciousness for the broad movement against imperialism. And in order to rouse their political consciousness, Gandhi always tried to interlink the peasant problems with nationalism and the nationalist movement. Hence a focus has been made on Gandhi's mind and technique towards various peasant movements and the changes which occurred in his outlook in the later stages of his life.

The seventh and concluding chapter highlights the main conclusions that have emerged from the in-depth study of the various movements during the period of our study.

A few hypotheses have been tested to get a clear picture of the peasant movements as these reveal themselves. An application of Gandhian response towards these has also been focussed. First, Gandhi was trying to mobilize the peasants for the anti-imperialist movement on the basis of united front strategy. Secondly, Gandhi, practically on all occasions, compromised with the Zamindars etc. Thirdly, he was not only balancing the contradictions emerging out of the relations between peasantry, Zamindars, landlords, but he also tried to smoothen intraparty conflicts arising out of the ideological differences among the leaders within the Congress. And lastly, during the period under study, the peasant interests were clear
and strong and a strong peasant leadership had begun to emerge at the grass root level, which was not to the liking of Gandhi.

Besides, all these chapters, the thesis contains the glossary and bibliography, containing the source material consulted during my research work.

Ritu Lall

(RITU LALL)