CHAPTER-II

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES
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"In colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system, the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms.” - Frantz Fanon.

The above view of the revolutionary peasantry was expressed by Frantz Fanon dialogue of the agrarian revolution, reflects further through out the centuries, the peasant has risen in rebellion against his oppressors. But history is also replete with examples of peasants, who have been silently, and for long periods becoming vicious of exploitation and oppression. At the same time, occasional out breaks of peasant revolt do raise the question of the conditions in which the peasant becomes revolutionary. We cannot speak of the peasantry in this context, as a homogeneous and undifferentiated mass. Different sections have different aims and social perspectives, for each of them is confronted with a different set of problems. As a generalization about the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, Fanon’s statement thus begs many questions. Equally question-begging are those generalisation which dismiss the peasantry as a backward
servile, and reactionary class, incapable of joining hands with forces of social revolution. The peasants have in fact played a role, sometimes a crucial and decisive role, in revolutions.

In the transitional historical situation, we shall deal with a broad distinction which may be made between three sectors of the rural economy, or three modes of production. In the first place, we have the sector whose essential distinguishing feature is that the land is owned by landlords who do not undertake cultivation on their own account. Their land is cultivated by landless tenants, mostly share croppers who are classed as poor peasants. The second sector is that of independent small holders who own no more land than they cultivate themselves and enough of it to make themselves sufficient. They do not exploit the labour of others, nor their labour exploited by others. They are the middle peasants. A third sector is that of capitalist farmers are described as rich farmers, who own substantial amounts of land and whose farming is primarily based on the exploitation of wage labour, although they may participate in farm-work themselves. Unlike landlords, they undertake the business of farming and employ capital in it. Farm-labourers who are paid wages are referred to, as the agricultural proletariat, of the peasantry the share croppers-in the term ‘poor peasant.’ The use of terminology makes it quite clear that the essential distinctions are those of relations of production and not simply those of relative difference.

in wealth or property. We should qualify this three fold classification of the different sectors of the agrarian economy (or the different modes of production) by pointing out that there is a great deal of overlapping between these categories and the actual de-marcation between them is by no means sharp and clear. But we do not propose to pursue the question of transition from one mode of production to the other. The relation of transition from one mode of production to the other, is essential to the analysis which follows is that of economic exploitation and dependance of the poor peasantry, and this exists in either case. The crucial distinction, we wish to reiterate, is that of the economic independence of the middle peasant and the economic dependence of the poor peasant. We propose to examine their respective roles in the peasant movements in India.

The Indian peasant has been passive, un-fatalistic, docile, unresisting and bogged down in the quagmire of superstitions. The rural scene during the British period and thereafter has been bristling with protests, revolts and even large scale militant-struggles.

Literature on peasant agitations, peasant struggles, peasant revolts and rebellions as in other countries of the third world, are not available on an extensive scale. We have now useful accounts of such struggles from Latin America, some countries of Africa and south east Asia. Similarly, there are a number of studies portraying the significant and important role

played by Vietnamese, and other revolutions, which broke throughout the capitalist - colonial or semi-colonial frame-work, by passed societies into non-capitalist, social formations. In fact, during and after the second world-war, the peasantry in a large number of colonial and semi-colonial countries participated in massive scale both in the national liberation and in struggles to overthrow imperialism.

**AGRARIAN CLASSES IN INDIA:**

The agrarian social structure varies from one region to another. The relation among classes and social composition of groups that occupy specific class position, in relation to land control and use in India are so diverse and complex, that it is difficult to incorporate them all in a general scheme. Despite the diversity of social arrangements on land in different parts of India, Daniel Thorner, has attempted to reduce them into well-defined and precise social categories, on the basis of the three following criteria.

1. Type of Income obtained from the soil.
2. The nature of rights.
3. The extent of field work actually performed.

Taking this criteria, Thorner has outlined the following model of agrarian class-structure in India.

I. Maliks :-

Whose income is derived primarily from property rights of the soil and whose common interest is to keep the level of revenue while keeping the wage level down. They collect rents from tenants, sub-tenants and sharecroppers.

a) Big land lords, holding rights over large tracts, extending over several villages, they are absentee owners/renters with absolutely no interest in land-management or improvement.

b) Big land owners proprietors with considerable holdings but usually in the same village and although performing no field work, supervising cultivation and taking personal interest in the management and also in the improvement of land, if necessary.

II. Kisans :-

Working-peasants, having property interest in the land but actual rights, whether with legal or customary, inferior to those of the Maliks.

a) Small land-owners:- Having sufficient holding to support a family, who cultivate land with family labour and who do not either employ outside labour or receive rent.

b) Substantial tenants:- Tenants holding land-leased under tenancy Acts.
III Mazdoors:-

Those earning their livelihood, primarily working on others lands/plots.

a) Poor tenants, having tenancy rights but less secure holdings too small to suffice for a family’s maintenance and income derived from land often less than that earned by wage labour.

b) Share croppers:– Either tenants, at will leases, without security, cultivating land for others or share cropper basis having least agricultural implements.

c) Landless labourers:– Thorner’s three major categories, designated by the relations of production, are in relation to the means of production and in this sense, represent a Marxian model of agrarian classes, although Thorner himself does not specify the theoretical assumptions, underlying the model. Since a model can be drawn from the works of Lenin and Mao, especially, those relating to analyses of agrarian classes in the Russian and Chinese societies respectively. Land lords, Rich peasants, Middle peasants, Poor peasants and Landless labourers.

Obviously, then there is some risk in using a class model in analysis of an agrarian social structure, in a traditional society such as India. But the risk must be taken if any meaningful historical and comparative sociology of peasant movements in India is to be attempted. The concept of class (i.e., agrarian class) has been used in a Marxian sense to imply objective economic conditions or unity of economic interests only.
a) ANTI-FEUDAL STRUGGLES:-

In a country like India, where the tributary or feudal mode of production was dominant, the typical, self-contained village economy is the key to understand the agrarian relations.

According to Samir Amin, this pre-capitalist mode of production is called a tributary and it is very close to the feudal mode of production. It is characterised by the organisation of society into two main classes. (1) Peasantry and (2) Ruling Class 4.

In such a society, according to Amin, the peasantry will be organised into rural communities and the ruling class which monopolizes the society’s functions of political organisation, levies a (non-commodity) tribute from the rural communities. This tributary mode of production has similarities to that of feudal mode of production. The feudal mode of production is constantly threatened with disintegration, if for whatever reason, the feudal lord should ride himself on some of his tenants, free his serfs, in other words, proletarianise them. That is to say, that the production relations in the feudal mode of production, will undergo transformation, where the rich peasants and agricultural labourer will arrive in place of the feudal lord and serf.

A majority of villagers, who have many dealings with the rest of the world, who enjoy the benefits of participating in product markets and credit markets operating at higher levels than the villagers but who are restricted

to the land market and the labour market, confined within the village, this gives rise to a patron-client relationship between parties entering into transactions.

This traditional Indian economy was shattered in its functioning by the onset of colonialism, represented by British rule. Here, the British conquest differed from every previous conquest in that, while the previous foreign conquerors left untouched the economic basis and remained a foreign force, acting from outside and withdrawing its tribute outside the British rule tinkered with this age-old system and sought to transfer the agrarian relations. Here was also the victory of capitalism in Europe, and the destructive process was not accompanied by any corresponding growth of new forces. From this, arises the particular "melancholy" attaching to the misery of the India British rule who finds himself faced with "the loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one."

A discussion had ensured among historians about the nature of the land system of the period earlier to the British. The notion that there is communal ownership of land, in the village as opposed to the notion of private property in land was shared by many social scientists. From the evidence available, according to one view, land was the common property of the village communities, though cultivation was not. The other view holds that private property in land was in vogue in ancient and Moghul period.

The outstanding feature of the economy of India before the advent of British power as according to one view\textsuperscript{9}, was the self subsisting and self-perpetuating character of its typical unit. The chief sign of submission to that authority was the payment each year of a share of the village produce, in some period amounting to one sixth or less and in others as much as third or even one half, within the village, social and conventions of great antiquity\textsuperscript{10}. Thus, the village is practically cut off from outside influences. Since it is described as a subsistence economy, its trade relations with outside world are also either minimum or practically cut off from outside influences. Since it is described as a subsistence economy, its trade relations with outside world are also either minimum or practically non-existent. According to Mukherjee and Fry Kenbeg, land control of the rytwari kind seems to have existed in Ancient South India and it is certain that immediately prior to the introduction of the company rule, it would have been the prevailing mode of land control in the village system. In this tradition, each individual had been obliged to submerge his own identity and to sacrifice his own interest for the common will of the village as determined by the lords. The elite of the village affairs were controlled by person, whose title by local customs might be any of the following: Pedda riathu, Reddy, Kapu, Dora, Patel, Kadim, Mirashidar, Gumatana. These persons were the head-men of the elite of their village. According to one argument, the rytwari policy of the company rule swept away village elite group and it eliminated their rule as intermediary between the Government and other villages. In short, as rythu began paying elite classes, ceased to function as rentiers and hence

\textsuperscript{9} Singh V.B. : Village community in Economic History of India 1857-1956, Page 88.
\textsuperscript{10} Thomer Daniel & Alice : Land and Labour in India. Asia publishing House, Bombay 1965. P.51.
lost authority and influence. But a more correct view argues that village leadership was not eliminated, but the Government instead of dealing with village leadership jointly, set about trying to deal with leaders separately and if possible, to deal directly with every rythu, every family of gentle work in the village.  

THE FEUDAL SETTING IN TELANGANA:—

Thus even prior to the introduction of ryotwari tenure, land was held by peasants, but there were some local leaders who were acting as intermediaries, but these intermediaries were not as powerful as the Deshmukhs and Despandes in Telangana.

There in Deccan region, it can be presumed that as in the case of Moghal empire, the peasants exercised ownership rights, even though strictly it may not be termed so in the judicial sense. Therefore within the sphere of a subsistence village economy, throughout self contained all times, there was little scope for the development of big land owners like Deshmukhs and Despandes as in the later period after Sir Salar Jung reform. The village economy in the Deccan, prior to reforms introduced by Sir Salar Jung can be characterised at best as a small peasant economy run on feudal lines.

The British conquest of India through the agency of the East India Company led to the most drastic changes in the Indian way of life. The most fundamental of these changes was the dis-integration of the older structure of the village community, partly as a result of new land systems.

introduced by the British and partly as a result of the spread in the nineteenth century of commercial agriculture. Two major types of land revenue system were devised, each of which shook the older structure of village life in India. In Bengal and adjacent areas beginning in 1793, the British converted the tax farmers and revenue collectors into private land lords, granting them some, but not all, of the rights of private property in the land. This was done on condition that the new land lords would raise greatly enhanced revenues from the cultivating peasants and post the bulk of these revenues on to the state. This land revenue system is known as the Zamindari System.\textsuperscript{12}

**ZAMINDARI SETTLEMENT:-**

With the introduction of permanent zamindari settlement of land in 1793, the land-lords were created and the concept of private property in land was fully established and the village community system was lost forever. The basis was thus laid for the formal emergence and establishment of new classes. This had far reaching-effect on the rural society of Bengal and Coastal districts of Andhra of old Madras province, where the Zamindari system introduced an element of built inequality in the economic structure, for on the one hand the disintegrated peasantry, benefit of their ownership of land, slowly went down to the position of share croppers and agricultural labourer, on the other enthranced themselves in the soil by subjecting the peasantry to various forms of feudal and semi feudal exploitation have emerged as a potent force in the agrarian structure Daniel Thorner refers to this as a “built-in-depressor” in the village economy.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Danial and Alice Thorner. Land and Labour in India. Asia publishing House, Bombay 1965 Page 53.

\textsuperscript{13} ibid
of the village community system, the basis of Indian Feudalism, Fiscal and military-disappeared and the British reimposed Feudalism, the nominal type in another form. The two things were achieved by the British, when they introduced the Zamindary system. First they converted the economy to suit the demands of commodity production of crops and second, they were able to extract high revenues which were reinvested in Britain for industrialisation.

Thus the two systems (Zamindari system, Rayatwari settlement) introduced in the course of the nineteenth century, remained as the dominant land systems of British India from 1793-1947. In the pre-British period, the self-sufficient village economy was based on the union of handicrafts and agriculture. The agriculturist exchanged a portion of his product with the village weaver who supplied him cloth for his family. Marx also observes that the village system had been built on the domestic Union of Agricultural and manufacturing pursuits. The handloom and the spinning-wheel were the pivots of the structure of the old Indian society. But it was the British intruders who broke-up the Indian handloom and destroyed the spinning wheel. There by, Britain produced the greatest, and to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of Asia14.

The impact of British rule led to the disintegration of village community. The evolution of new structure of agrarian relations, was extremely regressive. The new system did not at all permit the development of agriculture. New social classes appeared at the top, as well as, at the bottom of the social scales. There are land lords, intermediaries and money lenders at the top and tenants-at-will, share croppers and agricultural labourers

at the bottom. The new pattern was neither capitalism non-feudalism nor was it a continuation of the old Mughal arrangement. It was a new structure that colonialism evolved. It was semi-feudal and semi-colonial in character.

AGRARIAN UNREST AND PEASANT REVOLTS:-

The British occupation of India for nearly two centuries brought about profound changes in almost all sectors of the Indian-society. The present concern is however confined to the changes it produced in the agrarian social structure i.e., in the structure of land control and in agrarian class relations as well as the peasant responses to these changes. Transformation of the land revenue system, under the British rule affected Indian peasantry. Initially, all agrarian classes were distressed by the government’s high revenue demands, although the economic burden was greater for the lower strata of peasantry. The resulting discontentment manifested in many ways. Either, the peasants (actual cultivator) revolted against their oppressors or the landlords under whom they held land or sometimes all the agrarian classes joined together and rebelled against the stringent demands of the state.

The Zamindars dispossessed for defaults in revenue collection or for similar reasons under the permanent settlement in Bengal, became the rallying point for peasant rebellions. This was particularly true of the tribal regions in India, where a series of uprisings occurred during the first half of the nineteenth century. In Bihar and Orissa several tribal chiefs were being

Hinduised under Brahmin influence and while the new laws and revenue regulations of the permanent settlement were being extended to the tribal regions, undermining the traditional authority of the tribal chiefs. Those who failed to comply with revenue demands and other regulations, were displaced, while the tribal lands were confiscated and auctioned to recover dues. Auctioned land invariably went to upper-caste Hindus like Brahmin, Mahajan or urban money-lenders. The new landlords were given unlimited powers to increase the rents of their tribal tenants. When rack sending and oppression by the new Zamindars and the intrigues and corrupt practices of petty revenue officials became unbearable, tribal insurrections shook the whole of Bihar and Orissa. It appears that although the general cause of the tribal revolts, was the total or partial dislocation of the tribal society and economy caused by the new system of political authority, revenue law and market economy, agrarian grievances of the tribal tenant by beneath the insurrections. The body of the rebel army was the new zamindars, money lenders, or the British troops often commissioned to enforce the new system.

**SANTAL UPRISING:**

The santal uprising of 1855-56 was in fact a part of the same tribal and agrarian unrest. Even in the Santal region, their entire identity and peasant economy were strongly offended by the imposition of an alien-land-revenue administration, and of stranger zamindars. A wholesale appropriation of land for recovery of revenue-dues and land transfers to urban money-lenders, had deeply hurt the tribal sentiment. Their response to official tyranny was widespread and violent. When the Santals rose in arms, several landlords, mahajans and darogas (police) were murdered. British forces

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suppressed the insurrection ruthlessly and several thousand Santal insurgents were massacred in the operation. These rebellions of the first half of the nineteenth century differed slightly from those of the latter part of the Mughal-era. A strong tribal identity provided the later peasant uprisings with the necessary impetus, but at the level of political consciousness, there probably was hardly any difference between the two. Agrarian lenders, or the British troops often commissioned to enforce the new system, discontent was however the only common element, besides the fact that both tended to be restorative types of revolt.

**AGRARIAN PERSPECTIVE OF 1857 REVOLT:-**

The circumstances in which the great Indian revolt of 1857 occurred and its consequences are relevant in this context. It is true that liquidation of the landed-aristocracy in Oudh (U.P.) under the principle of British paramountancy was one of the most important and immediate causes of the revolt. But this does not mean, that the entire uprising was engineered by the dispossessed landed-elite and that the masses played no part at all. Between 1840 and 1857, the transfer of land from cultivators to non-cultivating classes or money-lenders, urban traders and so on, had increased considerably. Eviction, the imposition of levies, and illegal taxes by corrupt revenue officials had steadily built up tension. The unrest finally culminated in 1857 revolt.

Unfortunately, the agrarian aspect of the Indian Mutiny has been either underplayed or over looked both by official sources and by those historians who have relied exclusively on them. Even Marx, in his despatches on the Indian revolt (written for the New York Daily Tribune) did not take sufficient notice of peasant unrest at the grass-root level. He thought that the only class affected by the British land policy was the feudal aristocracy
of Oudh and that it had not touched the actual cultivators, who supported the landed nobility during the uprising.\textsuperscript{19}

The tyranny of zamindars along with the exorbitant rates of British land revenue led to a series of spontaneous peasant uprisings in different parts of the country during the period 1857-1921. The periodic recurrence of famines coupled with the Economic depression during the last decades of the 19th century, further aggravated the situation in the rural areas and consequently, led to numerous peasant revolts.

In 1917-18 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Congress led two significant peasant struggles. It organised the struggle of peasants of champaran in Bihar against the Indigo planters, most of them were Europeans. Thereafter, it launched the Satyagraha movement of peasants in Kaira against the collection of land revenue which they were unable to pay due to failure of crops. Despite the fact that the Indian National Congress came into existence in the late 19th century, it took cognizance of the peasant problems, only in the second decade of the 20th century. The first Kisan Congress held at Lucknow 1935 led to the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha. The programme of the Sabha, reflected the aspiration and needs of the entire peasantry in agrarian India.

\textbf{ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA:-}

In Andhra Pradesh it launched anti-settlement agitation against Zamindari “Zulum” in 1927. Swami Sahjanand, one of the eminent leaders and pioneers of the All India Kisan Sabha led a heroic movement for the abolition of zamindari in Bihar. A powerful struggle was initiated against the

\textsuperscript{19} Karl Marx: Land Tenure in India. New York Daily Tribune.
oppressive forest laws in South India in 1927. Similarly, in U.P. and other parts of India, agitations were launched against the tyranny of zamindars.

The nature and extent of peasant revolts in India during the British colonial rule have not yet received adequate attention in historical writings in India. The early colonial historians, and their modern disciples have drawn the picture of a docile and concentrated-peasantry living under the shelter and comfort of pax Britannia. Apart from the security to life and property provided by British rule, it was argued that the peasants were the beneficiaries of a more benevolent revenue system compared to surplus extracted by the "Indian despotic rulers like the Sultan of Mysore, the Nawab of Oudh and the Nizam of Hyderabad. Even the nationalist historians, who have recognised the severity of the colonial and feudal exploitation of the primary producers, have generally ignored the struggle of the peasantry against this exploitation. The peasantry bore the burden either with stoic indifference or with fatalistic resignation. Inspite of occasional outburst against money lenders and landlords, it is argued that religions, influenced and caste loyalties had ensured social harmony in rural India. This however, is a rural India. This is however, misleading picture, Kathleen Gough had identified 77 peasant revolts in various parts of India 'The smallest of which probably engaged several thousand peasants in active support or combat. Gough's estimate is perhaps very modest. A more detailed survey would show a substantially larger number. The details of many revolts remained in the official records of the British Government, entered under rather misleading titles like religion-disturbances, communal riots, fanatical outbreaks etc.,. Some of these revolts, though basically agrarian in character, assured communal dimensions, due to land being controlled by a dominant religious

group. In such a situation, in the absence of class consciousness and proper leadership, ideological influence of religion provided the necessary moral force and justification for the struggle against exploitation and oppression. The revolt of the Mopplah peasantry of Malabar during the 19th and 20th centuries is a good example of such a phenomenon.

THE MOPPLAH REBELLION IN MALABAR:-

Malabar was ceded to the East India Company in 1792 by Tipu Sultan after his defeat in the third Anglo-Mysore War. The Cannanore, Kozhikode, Palghat and Malappuram districts of the present state of Kerala roughly comprise the former Malabar District.

The traditional structure of agrarian society in Malabar was based on age old feudalism, hierarchically ordained to reaching down to the lowest structure. The “Jenni” (landlord) ‘Kanakkaran’ (protector) and the peasant shared the produce equally, working at a social equation, on the basis of natural dependence and reciprocal interests, within the confined of a feudal system of exploitation. The introduction of British administrative institutions led to the dissolution of this system by the substitution of a strong central power for the divided authority of feudal chieftains. The land revenue system introduced in Malabar was basically different from the pattern in other parts of the Madras presidency. The most common features of exploitation were through the enhancement of rent, and imposition of renewal fees. In view of the oppressions and exploitation of land-lords it was indeed strange that 15.1 percentage of the tenants should have attributed their indebtedness to excessive rents and excessive renewal fees.
In a sense, the reason for indebtedness was immaterial. What was relevant was that the large bulk of the peasantry was not getting even for bare subsistence.

The tenants and sub-tenants thus oppressed and harassed, rose up in revolt against their landlords. There were 45 uprisings during the course of the 19th century. Most of them were in the Eranad and Walluvanad taluks of south Malabar. The peasantry in these inland talukas were mostly Mappiles holding land either directly from a Hindu Jenni or from intermediary. The Mallialas were at the bottom of the Tenurial structure and all the higher steps of the ladder were occupied by the Hindus either as intermediaries or as Jennis. Hence the conflicts between the Mopplier peasantry and the Hindu land owning class appeared to be the result of communal tension. The Madras Government described it as the "Moppila outrages".

In view of the mounting tension among the agrarian classes, the Government of India has derived immediate steps to be taken to secure permanency from arbitrary ejectment to all. But the Madras Government did not undertake a comprehensive legislation for safeguarding the interests of the peasantry. The Relief Acts, therefore, did not register any improvement in the condition of the tenants. All the malpractices and oppressions of the landlords noticed in mid-nineteenth century, continued unabted. The Mappila peasantry of the inland taluks of south Malabar, were the worst hit by these trends. Thus by the end of the second decade of the century, the condition of the cultivator in south Malabar had become extremely miserable.

21. Denzil ibbetson to Secretary: Madras Government 29th Aug 1895 Legislative Department part-B September 1895 No.25
Therefore, there were signs of mounting tension among the agricultural classes. The beginning of the village, about five miles north west of Manjeri in the earned taluk of south Malabar, was inhabited predominantly by the Moppiles.

This transformation lay in the interaction between the political and economic forces in Malabar, in the second decade of the 20th century. The nationalist agitation gathered momentum during this period and the congress activities slowly penetrated into the rural region. Mahatma Gandhi and Shaukath Ali visited Malabar in August, 1920 and addressed a public meeting at kozhikode. Though their call for non-cooperation did not arouse much enthusiasm among the middle and upper urban strata. The Khilafat movement received immediate response from the Mopplaiah, especially in south Malabar. Though the Mopplaiah’s were thus aroused to action against British imperialism, the general character of the movement controlled by the urban-based middle class, continued to be carried on violent incidents and non-cooperation. The political development in 1921, as discussed earlier, led to the merger of Khilafat and tenant interests representing anti-imperialism and anti-landlordism. This created a sense of cohesion and solidarity among the peasantry.

PUNNA-PRA VYALAR PEASANT MOVEMENTS:-

During the Independence struggle a new chapter was created by Punna-pra Vyalar peasant movement which is the most popular movement in Kerala State.

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In the erstwhile Madras state, the Travancore estate was ruled by Diwan Sir C.P.Rama Swamy Iyer. He influenced the course of government. He demanded for the separate state for Travancore with a country status. He provoked the people for this demand in the name of availability of natural resources and self-sufficiency.

In the Travancore estate the social, and economic and political conditions of the people were very oppressive. The landlords were exploiting the small farmers and the agricultural labourers and treating them as slaves. They were refusing to pay their daily wages. If the labours and small farmers ask them their wages, not only they loose next day's work, but they had to vacate the huts, mercilessly. The tenants had to pay abnormal land tax to them and at the time of festivals they had to present gifts to landlords and their family members. This exploitations did not exempt poor and hand-to-mouth living fisherman. The fisherman has to pay major share of his earnings to the landlords.

The atrocities of the estate landlords did not spare even the workers. The agricultural labourers formed an organisation at sherthally and Alleppy to oppose the atrocities and to redress their grievances. They organised the movements.

Small peasants and other workers also joined in this movement. By using the police and military force on 23rd October, 1946 at “Punna-pra” area, attacked the peasants and workers organisation. Again on 27th October 1946, the military force encircled the island of “vyalar” area near to the sea and massacred the people.

23. V.S. Achuyatamandam; T.K. Rama Krishna: Punna-Pra-Vyalar and other movements: (Telugu Edn.) Prajashakti Book Shop, Vijayawada, A.P.
The Diwan government was attacked and suppressed the peasant and workers movement. At the above places of “Punna-pra-Vyalar” areas the large number of people were mercilessly killed. Though this movement was suppressed, it achieved many demands and laid the foundation for the peasant and workers movements later.

REVOLT OF THE VARLIS:-

The basic cause of the mass-upsurge of the varlis (Bombay State) lay in their unstable condition of wretchedness and their suppression by the tyrant landlords. They had rated in these conditions for a century unnoticed and uncared and crushed under the burden of the last world war. The economic conditions of these serfs, who were living on the lowest conceivable level of human existence, deteriorated. Their condition of life became so intolerable that they were driven to resort to the weapon of strike for securing an increase in their daily wages. About 3000 Varlis in umbergon taluk struck work in 1944 when the harvesting season began and demanded a daily rate of wage of annas 12 for agricultural operation, cutting grass and felling trees. For the first time, the Varlis had dared to raise their voice of protest against inhuman exploitation and wretched condition of life by refusing to slave for the landlords and the timber merchants for daily wages which would not fetch them half a cup of tea. Even the strike was a spontaneous outburst. Though the strike failed, it helped them to have a glimpse of the strength of their unity possessed. They became conscious that if they were united their unity, would posses the strength to fight their oppressors successfully. While campaigning for conference, the Maharastra Kisan Sabha for the first time came into contact with the aboriginal hill
tribes of umbergon in December, 1944 and the kisan sabha workers helped the varlis to resist the demand of the sowkars (Provisions Supplier=businessmen) for vetti (force labour) and to stop it. The conference took momentous decisions. It adopted the immediate programme of abolishing serf-tenure and forced-labour. It urged the varlis to resist their oppressors with their united strength and formulated the following four main and simple slogans.

"Do not cultivate the private land of the landlords unless he paid in cash the daily wage of Annas (16 annas=One rupee). Do not render any free service to the landlord. Resists him if he assaults you. You must all unite".

Assaults and tortures of Varlis which had been quite routine and common occurrence in their life were stopped automatically. Their strength instituted such a dread in the hearts of the sowkars that they dared not raise their finger against the Varlis. The aboriginal serf had abolished forced labour. He proceeded to abolish serf-tenure. The victory of Kisan Sabha made him fearless and audacious. Abolition of serf tenure was a glorious victory. It retained him his freedom which he (varlis) had lost, a century ago. When the news of the victorious march of the umbergaon varlis crossed their borders, their hesitation ceased and they became impatient. Without waiting for the Kisan Sabha, they moved on the march. They launched their offensive against their oppressors unaided. The Red-Flag which they had carried from the umbergaon conference was their only guide and they felt that they could achieve their liberation under its inspiration.

24. Reproduce from Revolt of the varlis: by S.V. Parulekar, people's publishing House, Bombay 1947, Chapter-IV.
The problem of debt-slavery was very acute in Dahanu. The decision to liberate debt-slaves was prompted by none. The varlis had understood the movement of the Red flag as the movement of their liberation and liberation of debt-slaves was its integral part. The liberation movement entered its second phase, when the varlis went on strike in the first week of October, 1945. The season for cutting grass had approached. The Kisan Sabha had demanded the minimum of Rs. 2-8 for cutting 500 lbs. of grass. The sowkars refused to concede the demands. The varlis refused to cut the grass. In the initial stages of the movement, the sowkars had used all the weapon in their armory for disrupting the solidarity of the varlis. The strike stemmed the landlords. The Undaunted Varlis marched ahead. Torture and repression had failed in their objective of crushing their movement. They had emerged stronger, more united. The strike succeeded, inspite of the firing and repression. The Varlis secured the rate of Rs. 2-8 for cutting 500 lbs. of grass which they had demanded.

The struggle of the Varlis which brought them on the political horizon of the province, secured recognition to the problem of the aboriginal hill tribes which had been ignored, as one of the important items in the National reconstruction and became making-event in the history of the struggle for their emancipation started at the end of September, 1946.

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TEBHAGA MOVEMENT:-

The Tebhaga movement in Bengal in the mid-forties was a struggle by share croppers to retain a two-thirds share of the produce for themselves and thereby to reduce the rent they paid to ‘Jotedars’ - a class of rich farmers who held superior rights inland from one half of the one-third of their produce. The movement was limited in its impact spread and was launched at a crucial juncture on the eve of India’s Independence and partition of the sub-continent. Prior to the Tebhaga struggle, many agrarian movements developed within the frame work of the Indian National movement but, with a few exceptions, their dominant ethos was Gandhian, as they sought reformist goods through ‘passive resistance’ and ‘non-violence’. The Tebhaga movement was, however a marked departure from this pattern. Being the out growth of left wing mobilisation of the rural masses, it was the first consciously attempted revolt by a politicized peasantry in Indian History. Therefore, the movement assumed a special significance in the study of Indian peasant-struggles.26

The Tebhaga movement, which arose in North Bengal, including the district of Dinajpur and Rangpur in East Bengal and Jalpaiguri and Malda in India. The slogan of the movement was the demand for reduction of the ‘proprietors’ share of the crop from one half to one-third. The ‘proprietors’ of the land, jotedars, were ‘occupancy tenants’ who possessed transferable and heritable rights to the land, and paid a fixed money-rent to the zamindars, the great landlords. Over the years, the fixed money rent had become a relatively small part of the value of the crop so that, in course of time, the jotedars appropriated the largest share of the crop which they extracted from

the cultivator of the land, the share croppers. The latter were called adhwars or bargardars; the number of landless in Bengal has been variously estimated at between a fifth and a quarter of the rural population.

But the Tebhaga movement enveloped bulk of Bengali peasantry consisting of small peasant proprietors which it arose. The vast majority of Bengali peasantry consisting of small peasant proprietors with tiny holdings, many of whom supplement their income by share cropping. The bulk of them are under a heavy burden of debt, the lenders generally being the rich jotedars, and any analysis of class conflict in the Bengal country side must especially take into account of the effects of usury on the situation of the middle peasants. The situation of most of them is precarious, for they live from hand-to-mouth and a crop failure or death of a farm animal, may easily overwhelm them. Jotedars are only too eager to seize their lands when they are unable to meet their liabilities.

Bhowani Sen, a communist theoretician and leader of the Tebhaga movement, explained thus. “The middle peasant of today the share cropper of tomorrow. And the peasant is painfully assure this prospect. The situation of the middle peasant in Bengal is far more precarious than in many other regions. He was therefore only too willing to throw in his lot with the share croppers in the struggle against jotedars.” Infact, the movement did not begin as a movement of share croppers. Initially it was a movement of middle peasants in their own behalf, and later drew in the share croppers. According to Bhowani Sen, the origins of the peasant unrest which eventually led to the Tebhaga movement can be traced back to 1939. “The first movement began in Dinajpur district and it was not about sharing the crop. It arose on the issue of illegal imports levied by the jotedars and
their manipulation of produce markets to the detriment of the small peasants. He further commented that in this movement the Jotedars share of fifty was not challenged. Only illegal extractions were challenged and by their successful struggles, they put an end to them. A big victory, that happened in 1939, against the background happened in 1939, against the background of the war and a spontaneous rumour that the government was going to collapse, which gave confidence to the peasants. Prices had also begun to rise. The movement was very big but did not develop further, it subsided after winning some concessions. Things were then quiet until 1943.\(^{27}\)

In 1943, 3-5 million peasants perished in the great Bengal famine. Bhowani Sen points out that because the rich Jotedars were also the principal hoarders of food grains, hatred against them, was intense and universal. The great famine found the peasantry unprepared and unable to rise up against profiteers and food hoarders. The Bengal Kisan Sabha units, large number of students and people from educated middle classes were drawn into the voluntary relief work during the famine and into large scale medical relief in the following year. This brought about a new contact between the peasantry and educated youth, provided social education for both, and was a very important factor in creating new cadres for the Communist Party and the Kisan Sabha.

The movement had begun in Thakurgar sub-division of Dinajpur district as a middle peasant movement, these middle peasants of Jotdars; during the 1939-40 movement, had been politicized and the communist party had recruited many of them. The crucial battles of the Tebhaga were fought at harvest time, when the crop was shared out. But the fight did not

end then because the share croppers had to resist attempts by Jotedars, with the support of the police, to deprive them of their gains. This continuing struggle was led by peasant committees, which became a power in the village. They legitimized their authority in the name of a ‘New Raj’ 28 (as Bhowani Sen put it) by the summer of 1947 the movement collapsed. Bhowani Sen called to the peasants not to launch direct action that year, pleading that after Independence the Governments of India and Pakistan were to be given an opportunity to fulfilling their pledges to the people. Bhowani Sen’s call merely formalized the fact that the Tebhaga movement, which he described as ‘one of the biggest mass movements of our time’ had come to an end.

Clearly, then the Tebhaga movement was the out come of politization of the peasantry in Bengal. While the agrarian class structure, the social changes taking place until the mid-forties and economic crises following the war and famine were all conducive to such a resistance movement, without C.P.I. and Kisan Sabha activity the Tebhaga struggle would not have developed. This obviously weakened the resistance movement. Consequently, share cropping the highly retrogressive mode of agriculture production in Bengal, continued even after the Tebhaga struggle ended. The formal exercise of zamindari abolition in post-Independence land reforms, too, left the grievances of the share - croppers unredressed. Those very grievances of the poor peasantry in Bengal formed large in the 1960’s. Continuing the raison ‘d’ etere of the agrarian radicalism has come to be known as Naxalism in India. 29

b) TRIBAL PEASANT REVOLTS AND GONDS REBELLION

**Tribal Struggles:** As in other countries, India too witnessed serious clashes between the indigenous tribal people and foreign invaders, though those conflicts occurred several centuries earlier than those of the New world or much later discovered continent of Australia. Tribals and non-tribals in India live in two different worlds of their own. While there is not much antipathy between them, there is not much sympathy either in their mutual relations. While the tribal is content with his food gathering on pastoral way of life, the non-tribal is advancing to emulate the sophisticated man of the town and city, leaving very much behind, his tribal brethren. While the tribal still follows his produce-to-consume production policy, the non-tribal is taking to intensive cultivation, adopting the 'pro-market' type of cash economy. Non-tribals exploited the tribals, but this is not done on a mars scale but as man to man for personal advantage.

**TRIBAL UPRISING IN BRITISH INDIA:**

Of all the tribes of India, it is the fight with the Assam tribes that drew the British rulers into the vortex of an India-wide struggle with the tribal people, which necessitated a drastic change in their approach to the tribes and their problems. The tribals too initiated struggles to safeguard their honour, to protect their cherished freedom, and to get redress against the money lender, the zamindar, and other parasitic landholders, who tried to deprive them of all they had. Dr. B.S. Guha, the Director of Department of Anthropology, Government of India, while reviewing the disturbances

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30. V. Raghavaiah: Tribal Revolts (Reproduced)
that occurred in the tribal areas, observed that “the underlying causes of these uprisings were the deep dissatisfaction created among the tribal people, against exploitation by their more advanced neighbours. Just as there has been a clash of economic interests in the various tribal uprisings, there has been a clash of culture also between the tribals and non-tribal vested interests, bulworked by the ruling authority, who in their initial stages of administration and unsettled authority had to lean upon the educated and the landed classes, who were potential Trouble Makers. This policy was continuously followed by the British throughout their rule in this country, which even the present administration is not yet quite able to replace by a thoroughly democratic people’s rule.

In the tribals view, the jungle is his ancestral home. It was his birth place and cradle. Infact, he took to the jungle live fish to water. He loved the jungle and was least afraid of its carnivorous denizers. He collected a large part of his food from it in the shape of yawns, he could dig, edible nuts, fruits, flowers and leaves, he could pluck to satisfy himself with the items of forest produce, including, medicinal herbs, fuel, honey and housing material.

Mahatma Gandhi observed, that if we are a little serious we will realize the great and pressing problem of the Aboriginals. We can ill-afford to allow such a huge population as that of the Adivasis to remain illiterate, ignorant, and labouring under great hardships like object poverty, unsympathetic administration, serfdom to sowcars and landlords and unkind exploitation by more advanced sections of the general population.
The British Indian Government became alert to the situation arising out of tribals, armed struggles but did little to mitigate the real suffering of the tribals. Further, it resulted in the demarcation of excluded and partially excluded tribal areas. An examination of tribal agrarian revolts in India during the British period reveal that all of them have a few common characteristic features. They are:

1. Except in North East India, in all the other areas, tribal agrarian revolts were defensive in nature. The tribals having failed to attract the attention of the concerned authorities, took to insurgency as a last resort.

2. Alienation from land and forest resources were invariably the main grievances of the tribals.

3. Revolts were unplanned and their pent-up a rage against the corrupt-officials suddenly became the immediate cause of the incident.

4. Every tribal revolt during this period was brutally suppressed. The tribals were characterised as brutal and inhuman in treating their victims. But the British forces and police proved more brutal and inhuman in their suppression of the revolt. They caused not only bodily harm but even material harm by burning down hundreds of tribal villages.

5. In almost all the revolts while the lower caste people living in tribal areas supported the tribes. The higher caste people, zamindars, Jagirdars, landlords, traders and money lenders, stood behind the forces of suppression. There were the people who were against change in the existing productive relations.
6. In many of revolts, the leaders leading the revolt were attributed with supernatural powers and believed to be invulnerable to guns and cannon. Perhaps this belief gave strength to the tribals to face the guns and cannons of British, armed only with bows, arrows and axes.

7. In most of the cases, leadership came from the local tribals only.

8. Almost all the tribal revolts were treated merely as law and order problem by the British India Government.

9. After the suppression of the revolts, very little effort was made to probe thoroughly into the reasons leading to armed struggle among the tribal communities.

THE MANYAM UPRISING 1922-24:-

Coming to Andhra Pradesh, one of the most popular with a wide impact and the earlier struggles of the tribals led by Alluri Seeta Rama Raju popularly known as the Manyam revolt. This revolt was against the armed forces of the British Government. It took place in 1922 and lasted for a couple of years upto March 7th, 1924, the Manyam leader Alluri Seetha Rama Raju was brutally shot dead under the orders of Major Goodalle. This was perhaps the longest War waged on the Indian soil against the alien exploiters, the British. The immediate cause of the uprising was the extraction of the Andhra Agency for constructing a high way, penetrating thick jungles and across low hills from Narsipatnam to Chintapalli.

Those were the days of non-cooperation and civil disobedience, preached by Mahatma Gandhi. The saint (Seetha Rama Raju) from Mogallu excited by Gandhiji’s preaching and asked the people to non-cooperate,

32 Reproduced from ‘Tribal revolts by’ V. Raghavaiah, Andhra Rastra Adimajathi Sevak Sangh.
with the result that his advice was immediately accepted and word was passed from one end to the other, in the Agency to resist all demands on their labour.

Alluri Seetha Rama Raju joined the non-cooperation movement of 1921, organised village panchayats, was placed under police surveillance by the Government authorities, but later secured relaxation from the surveillance and freedom of movement and then wanted to visit Nepal. He was convinced that to achieve freedom from a foreign rule, he had no other alternative except to choose the path of violence.

Alluri worked upon the usually well known grievance of the people against forest authorities, against the restrictions placed by the forest officials on the wasteful cultivation of "Podu" the slash and burn method by the tribals which even now constitutes a chief factor of tribal inhabiting villages bordering on reserved forests, throughout the country, the high-handed misbehaviour of one, Bastian, the then Tahsildar of Gudem, who was provoking the tribals, every day by forced labour on them for constructing the Narsipatnam-Chintapally Agency road.

The revolt under Seetha Rama Raju's leadership is similar to the previous revolts of Santals, Mudas, Gonds and Bhils. The people were provoked by genuine grievance against Government officials who were unimaginative and wooden. All the three were major revolts in which thousands of tribals took part actively for securing freedom from official interference and oppression. The after effects of all these revolts, were crushing and disastrous to the defeated tribals. Coming to the point contrast the santal, Munda, Gond and Bhil revolts were sparked off by agrarian
grievances caused by money-lenders and petty Muttadari Zamindars while the immediate cause of the Alluri-led revolt was the enforcement of forced labour which the tribals resented.

All these struggles made the British, learn costly lessons. The result was grant of special treatment to the agency people for development, as a compensatory measure for part neglect and a realisation on the part of the authorities that the tribals required a protective approach rather than a mere an administrative one.

GONDS REBELLION:-

Tribal movements can be divided as movements organised by tribals in forest areas, which have not been cleared for cultivation purpose and movements organised by tribals in areas, where food cultivation has been taken up by tribals in right earnest. While the movement in the forest areas is mainly directed against the state, in other areas it is directed against the Semi-feudals. Since differentiation of peasantry exists in these food cultivating areas, tribal peasants have led the struggles against the exploiting classes. The tribals like the peasants, are docile in their nature. Unless some injustice is done to them, they will not assume a militant posture. Two main factors can be traced to the tribal-revolts, that occurred in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere in the country. There has been a clash of economic interests between tribal and non-tribals and often the exploitation and oppression have led to the tribal revolts. And the other major factor had been the clash of culture between tribal and non-tribal vested interests, which often led to social oppression by the non-tribals, ultimately leading to militant tribal movement.

33. Hamaza Alavi: Peasants and revolution in A.R. Desai (Ed) Peasant struggles in India. 1979
Tribal-revolts in Andhra Pradesh crept on several occasions. In Telangana part of the Nizam’s State, tribal revolts had taken place on two occasions. In 1842 captain Blunt’s Troops were attacked by Baster Gonds and Captain Blunt was to withdraw. Again in 1941 a sporadic uprising of the Gonds and Kolamled by Bheemu, had taken place in the Adilabad District of the Telangana area in the erstwhile Nizam’s State.

TRIBAL PEASANT REVOLTS IN ADILABAD:-

The district of Adilabad in Hyderabad State is the home of a large and solid block of aboriginal population of about 1,10,000 out of a total Gond population of 1,14,228 residing in the state, 71,874 are to be found in Adilabad district alone. (as per the census of 1941). Various Gond tribes seem to have been in occupation of lands in Adilabad when the system of clans following their leaders, in search of lands and means of subsistence.

LAND PROBLEMS OF THE ABORIGINALS:-

The migration of tribes from place to place will be in search of Virgin soil, and well watered pastures for their cattle. Each class settled where ever it found it convenient, and took possession of land. The Gonds seem to have a preference for the cultivation of light soil as the plateau lands, confirming themselves mainly to the first crop after the advent of rains, i.e. ‘Jawar’, ‘Kora’ the ‘Pulses’ and ‘Til’. They generally shifted their fields every two or three years, when the soil was exhausted. This shows that they had not the means to take to intensive cultivation of heavy black-cotton soils in the cold weather, except in small patch round their villages.

34. V. Raghavaiah, unrest in A.P. in A.R. Desai (Ed) peasant struggles in India. 1979
We some times hear of settling in new areas and protesting against exorbitant officials. The Gond did not understand any right other than the actual possession arising out of the clearance of the soil. He also did not have any conception of communal ownership of land.

**POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE LOCAL TRIBES:-**

The Deshmukh and Deshpandes mainly from the non-tribal class came up as farmers and collectors of revenue and slowly acquired importance at the expense of Gond feudal families. To this influx of new watendars, more than anything else, can be traced the decline in Gond feudal structure and the subsequent dislocation of Gond Economy. For, the new watandars secured Inam lands in most of the villages. These paved the way for further acquisition of lands in the tribal area. In the middle of nineteenth century the district began to witness a slow influx of non-aboriginal cultivators, mainly in the plains and foot hills of the district. Thus, it was that the Government pursued a policy of developing the district and raising its income. Thousands of cultivators were encouraged to immigrate and settle in the district. Many persons were encouraged to settle in villages and cultivate lands on ‘Kaul’ on contract of thirty years, on freedom of rent and subsequent concession of half rents and acquisition of patel and patwarigiri rights. And in this process the Gond had no share whatsoever.

In the beginning of the 20th century, cultivators who vacated their lands for some reason or the other, were shown by these patwari watandars as having relinquished the land to the Government. The patwari promptly applied for that land himself and got his rights as pattedar or the rightful owner recognised by the revenue officers, the Nazir Jamabandi. In this way
hundreds, of tribals who wanted to come back to their lands, suddenly found them in the possession of non-tribals. Thousands of acres passed out of the possession of the Gonds into the hands of the new settlers. The Gonds were degenerated from peasant proprietorship to that of a non-occupancy tenant or a landless serf. A number of these tribal villages have thus been acquired, and colonised by the non-tribals. Many of them have developed into absentee landlords, letting out lands to the tribals on rents mostly beyond the capacity of those people. Some have imported other cultivators and this has resulted in the tribals being ousted from their homes.

**FOREST POLICY AND AGRARIAN DECLINE:**

Before 20th century, the aboriginals of the hills were subjected to no restriction in the choice of land for cultivation. The Kolams and Naikpods practised shifting-cultivation on hill sides and the Gonds of most villages cultivated mainly the light soils of gentle slopes and hill tops, in more or less regular routine. The land of light soil, was usually cultivated for three years then allowed to revert to jungle, and was not taken again under cultivation until tenor of twelve years later, when sufficient fertility had collected.

**EFFECTS OF FOREST RESERVATION ON THE ABORIGINALS:**

The system of cultivating lands of light soil in rotation came to an end, however, when forest lives were drawn round the villages, which were thus established as enclaves within the reserved forest. The demarcation of
these forest-lines did not take place at the same time in the whole district, not everywhere were the same principles applied. The grave disadvantage of this, for the cultivators did not become apparent at once, but after some years, when the fields which they cultivated at the time of demarcation became exhausted and the Gonds wanted to follow their old routine of re-occupying the fallow lands, they could not do so as the land had in the meantime been claimed by the forest department. According to the principles of the reservation, patta lands were not to be compensated elsewhere. In practice, however, a good many lands held on patta by aboriginals have been included in the reserved forest without compensation being for lands, they were no longer allowed to cultivate. While villages in which at least part of the cultivated land was held on patta were established as enclaves, a number of Gond and Kolam villages which comprised no patta lands, were entirely included in the reserve and the inhabitant given a time-limit to evacuate the village lands. In pursuance of the policy of forest conservancy, large scale evacuations occurred in the Dhanora, Tilani, Kawal and Utnoor state forests. Many Gonds were hard-hit by the reservation of forest areas. Their position is still favourable compared to that of the majority of Kolams and Naikpods. Their traditional method of agriculture is shifting cultivation or ‘Podu’ on hill slopes.

The reservation of forest areas and the virtual prohibition of shifting cultivation have in many ways revolutionized the economy of the aboriginals. Their exploitation of the natural resources was further limited by the auctioning of such forest produce as grass, mahua, chiranji ‘Buchania latifolia’ barries’ and bamboo. The auctioning of these products is resented by the aboriginals, not so much because it restricts the supply for their own domestic use, but because it gives outsiders a lever for the collection of
various fees and dues. It appears indeed that many contractors take lease of grass, chiranji and Mahna not with a view to exporting these articles for sale, but only with a view to levying from the aboriginals payment for their domestic consumption, repaying thereby a handsome profit. Thus the contractor who takes the chiranji contract for a group of villages usually does not collect the fruits, but some time often the fruit season tours the villages and charges the aboriginals either per house as per tree for the fruit which he assumes that they and their children have eaten. Similarly mahna flowers are auctioned to contractors and these collected from the Gonds and Kolam @ Rs. 2/- and in rare cases as Rs. 1 per head of cattle, on the ground that the cattle feed on the corralae. Gross is also auctioned and the contractor acts on the same principles. Export of grass is apparently unprofitable, and so the contractors wait till the rains have started and then tour the villages and collect per house @ Rs. 8 to Rs.10, irrespective of whether a man has thatched house anew or has only used a few bundles for repairing his roof.

In almost all the hilly-parts of the Adilabad district, the forest lines are so close to villages that the aboriginals have no other choice than to graze their cattle in the reserves, and grazing fee is collected as a matter of course. The forest department levies per plough an annual fee for the wood needed in making plough and implements and fee for building material, but actually upto Rs. 5/- per plough is collected by some Choukidars as "dumpa patti", as those combined fees locally known. Not withstanding this annual fee, when a man actually builds a new house, he has to pay for the building materials at the valuation of Choukidar or Ranger. If a village is burnt down, which is not an altogether infrequent event, the Choukidar generally demands a certain sum for the rebuilding of each house. Another source of
difficulty is the Gond and Kolam custom of erecting marriage-booths and memorial posts. The choukidar usually demanded the fee, the aboriginal paid much against forest regulations. If he did not pay he was subjected to heavy fines. But even as long as the Gond and Kolam remain well within the limits of the law, he is subjected to numerous extortions by forest subordinates and annual ‘Mamools’ (Brides of small amount) for house for the ‘choukidar’ is ordinary usage, but with this cash payment few ‘choukidars’ are satisfied and the majority also demand contributions in kind from aboriginal villagers. It goes without saying that every ‘choukidar’ Sardar or Ranger expect to receive free supplies during their stay in any aboriginal village. The auctioning of the forest produce, which was one of the means of tribal subsistence, began by the forest department also, hit them hard. The Excise Officers also began auctioning of the Mohna flower, which is used by the Gonds in their diet, during the times of necessity. The aim was only to impose levy from the aboriginals and make money at their expense.

BACK GROUND TO THE BABIJHERI INCIDENT OF 1940:-

In view of all these extractions by forest officials, the bitterness of Gonds, Kolams and Naikpods with regard to the forest administration is not surprising. It is now possible to understand how the long friction between the forest and police subordinates on the one side and the aboriginals on the other, led to the Babijheri incidents in 1940. The immediate cause was fixing on a group of Gond and Kolam settlements in the Dhanora state forest. The Gonds rallied round their leader Komaram Bheemu.

35. C.V. Haimendorf: Tribal Hyderabad : Pub. the Revenue Department, Govt. of H.E.H, the Nizam, Hyderabad 1945.
36. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has raised recently a memorial for Komaram Bheemu at Jhodeghat (Adilabad), A.P.
The Central figure of the ‘Babijheri’ tragedy was Komaram Bheemu whose home village was Shankarpally near Asifabad. There, most of the land had fallen into the hands of Brahman and Komtis, and Bheemu has failed to obtain cultivable land in any other village, though at the same time Hindu and Muslim settlers were being granted ‘Patta’ on a large scale. Bheemu was an able young man who could read and write, but all his applications for land were fruitless. From Shankerpalli, he went first to Surdapur, the village of a Muslim-landlord and finally he settled Babijheri where he lived for about five years.

Babijheri was then a village of twelve Gond houses and scattered over the hills round the main settlement. When the boundary lines of the Dhanora state forest, where drawn, Babijheri, like many other villages, was not established as an enclave, and the inhabitants, who had no ‘patta’ rights, were told that they must evacuate the village. When they did not leave by the fixed date all their houses were set on fire by the forest guards. Many Kolams and Naikpods dispersed, but the Gonds and a few Kolams were allowed to settle at Jhodeghat. There too they were harassed by forest officials who demanded large sums of money for the permission to clear some land for cultivation, and threatened to burn the Gonds houses as they had done in Babijheri, if the money was not forth coming. Bheemu and four other Gonds then went to Hyderabad, and it is believed that they obtained there, permission to cultivate fifty-seven acres at Jhodeghat. But the local forest-guard persisted in his demand for money threatening Bheemu with the burning of the village. Bheemu then gave petition to the divisional forest ranger and several forest guards (‘sardar’, several Choukidars) accompanied by an armed force approached Jhodeghat to enforce its evacuation. They burnt some outlying hamlet, and cattles lied up in sheds were perished in
the process. The Gonds, enraged by the burning of houses, opposed there but without arms.

Bheemu and the Gonds of Jhodeghat decided to resist eviction at all costs, and it is said that Bheemu claimed magical powers and the faculty to hear the voices of God. This would hardly have been unusual among Gonds, used to seers (bhaktal) capable of communicating with Godns, while in trance. Bheemu was apparently of the same mental disposition, but in addition possessed great intelligence and the power of charismatic leadership. Hence he was able to give expression to the dissatisfaction of the Gonds, and succeeded in arming several hundred men to active resistance against the forest subordinates. The rumour that Bheemu intended to form a ‘Gond Raj’ was undoubtedly an exaggeration. He and his followers’ aims were strictly limited, namely their undisturbed cultivation of land in and around Jhodeghat, and freedom from the many illegal extractions by forest officials. Finally the Talukdar, as head of the districts, mounted a police action against Bheemu and the Gonds assembled at Jhodeghat. Negotiations were fruitless undoubtedly because none of the officials involved enjoyed the Gonds confidence, and Bheemu refused to give himself up. When the police advanced on the hill where Bheemu and his men had gathered, Bheemu fired a shot without hitting any one, and according to his followers without the intention of wounding any one in the police party. But the police went all out to inflict maximum casualties on the Gonds. They fired on the assembled Gonds at point blank, killed Bheemu and ten other Gonds on the spot and wounding many more, the remaining party was arrested. With this, the defiances of the tribes in the area ended.  

37. C.V. Haimendorf: Tribal Hyderabad: Pub. the Revenue Department, Govt. of H.E.H., the Nizam, Hyderabad 1945.
When compared with the tribal rebellions in other areas of the country, this small incident where eleven Gonds laid their lives in the hands of the police, draw greater attention from the Government of the Nizam and the result was the invitation of many welfare schemes and economic upliftment programmes for the benefit of the tribes of Adilabad.

c) TELANGANA PEASANT ARMED STRUGGLE

Peasant armed struggle:

The Telangana and in the adjoining districts of the Andhra delta was one of the two post-war insurrectionary struggles of peasants in India. It was launched by the Communist party of India after the shift from its earlier policy of collaboration (United front with the Congress) to a strategy of encouraging of initiating insurrectionary partisan struggles in India. The Telangana revolt began in the middle of 1946 and lasted for over five years till it was called off in October, 1951. The sustained-peasant-resistance provoked a land reform inquiry and legislation that produced some perceptible change in the agrarian social-structure of the region.

THE POLITICAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC SETTING:-

The Hyderabad state which was formed by the Nizam, after the death of the last Mughal Emperor, was reduced to a subsidiary feudatory state, covering an area of about 83,000 square miles, under the British, after the forgoing of Maharashtra area and the coastal and the ceded districts of

38. Danial Thomer, for example has classified Hyderabad State, including Telangana in the areas of some perceptible change, see Thorner Agrarian prospect in India P. 41-42.
Andhra area to the British. Hyderabad state was one of the largest princely states in India. There were three linguistic regions of Hyderabad. Telangana - constituted of nine districts of Telugu speaking people. Marathwada a region of five district of Marathi speaking people; and three Kannada speaking districts. The agrarian social structure in Hyderabad was like a page from medieval feudal history.'

In a pre-dominantly rural economy, land and labour were the principal means of production. The dominating influence, as the relations between people was their relation to land. There were three main types of land tenure: 1) Government land revenue system-'Khalsa' or 'diwani' lands ryotwari tenur (peasant proprietary system). 2) Jagirdari system-land given as gifts to noblemen by the Nizam, 3) Nizam's personal estate, Sarf-e-khas system.

**KHALSA LANDS:-**

Khalsa or Diwani lands about sixty percent of total land was held under these tenures. The land holders were not called 'owners' but were treated as pattadars (registered occupants). The actual occupants within each patta, were called shikridars, who had full rights of occupancy but were not registered. The pressure on land grew, the 'shikmadars', previously the cultivators of lands, began to lease at lands to sub-tenants for actual cultivation. These, later were tenants at will having neither legal rights in land, nor any protection against eviction.

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JAGIRDAR SYSTEM:-

There were some special tenures called Jagirs. Sarf-e-Khas, was the most important of them, being assigned to the Nizam himself as crown lands. Scattered in several parts of the state, the Sarf-e-Khas covered a total area of 8,109 square miles (1,961 villages and fetched revenue totalling about 20 millions of rupees which met the Nizam's household, staff, and other expenses and partly, the expenditure of his army. The Jagirdari system of land administration was the most important feature of the political organisation of Hyderabad. The Nizam created his own noblemen and bestowed on them one or other distinguished rank and order, each with a large grant of land.

These Jagirdars were thus typically feudal tenures, covering some 40,000 square kilometers in area but scattered in different parts of the state. Nearly 6,500 villages i.e., about a third of the state total area, were under the Jagirdar system conditions however, far more oppressive on Jagir lands than on the sarf-e-khas.

FEUDAL STATE:-

The Hyderabad state was overwhelming by dependent on the land revenues and Government rested almost entirely on the Political and administrative support of the feudals like the “Itrdars”, Maktadars, Samastans, in Jagirdari areas and semi feudals like the deshmukh’s, deshpande’s, patel, patwari in Diwani area.
The khalsa (diwani) land or the roiyatwari system produced no better alternative. On such lands, deshmukhs and despandes were the hereditary collectors of revenue for a group of villages. As the system of direct collections was introduced in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, these intermediaries were granted ‘vatans’ (annuities) based on a percentage of the past collection. Very often the deshmukh landlord a figure roughly midway between the bureaucratic official and the feudal himself, because the newly appointed village revenue official atleast had access to land records. His influence, thus permitted him to grab lands by fraud which, in countless, instances, reduced the actual cultivator to the status of a tenant-at-will or a landless labourer.

No where where in Hyderabad state was feudal exploitation of the peasantry more intense than it was in Telangana districts. Hence some of the biggest landlords individually owned several villages running into thousands of acres of land. Such concentration of land ownership in the hands of a few was more pronounced in Nalgonda, Mahaboobnagar and Warangal districts than elsewhere. Significantly, it was this region which was the focus of the peasant insurrection in 1946-51. Nalgonda was regarded as red fort of the communist revolutionaries. They wanted to convert it into venue of India.

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VETTI SYSTEM:-

In the local dialect these powerful Jagirdars and deshmukhs were called ‘Dora’, meaning ‘sir’, ‘Master’ or ‘lord of the village’. Dora, often a combination of a landlord, money lenders and village official, traditionally enjoyed several privileges including the services of occupational castes in return for some payment either in cash or in kind. But the Dora (Big landlord) tended to extract these services free, owing to his power and position. Such extractions had become some what legitimised by what was known as the “Vetti” (forced labour) system under which a landlord or a deshmukh could force family from among his customary retainers to cultivate his land and to do one job or the other - whether domestic, agricultural or official, as on obligation to the ‘Vetti’. Extractions were thus termed a symbol of the dominance of landlords in Telangana. Most of the agricultural labourers on whom the ‘Vetti’ obligations fell, were from the lower and untouchables castes of ‘Malas’ and ‘Madigas’. The bulk of the rural masses - the poor peasants, unprotected tenants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers came either from the lower untouchable caste, such as Malas and Madigas, or from tribal groups like the hill Reddies, Chenchus, Koyas, Lambadis etc. These tribal communities had long standing grievances against the government on account of its taxes and levies, and against money lenders and revenue officials who usurped their lands, and also against private contractors who exploited the tribal labourers in the forests, on construction sites, or in mines and collieries.

42. C.V.F. Haimendrof: "Tribal Hyderabad", 1945.
Hyderabad state was predominantly rural and agrarian as about 85 percent of its population lived in villages and 55 percent of them depended directly on Agriculture. For a long time the Government did not pay much attention to agriculture. No separate grant for the improvement of the agriculture was provided in the State Budget till 1911. It was only during 1911-12 that the government spent Rs. 12 crores on the construction of a number of irrigation and allied works\textsuperscript{43}.

Two important aspects of the agrarian economy of an otherwise backward region like Telangana can be noted here. First, the development of irrigation facilities and cultivation of commercial crops had been taking place since the late nineteenth century. Secondly, the development in commercial farming was not, however, matched by any corresponding growth of towns, of industrial enterprise, and markets, nor even of transport and communication facilities. Consequently, cultivators had to depend almost entirely on urban money lenders, traders, merchants and businessmen who controlled the few and highly centralized markets in Telangana for the sale of their produce.

**LAND ALIENATION:**

Land alienation increased considerably between 1910 and 1940, particularly during the depression, when many lands previously owned by tribal peasants, passed into the hands of non-cultivating urban interest, mostly Brahmans, Marwadis, Komtis and Muslims. As a result of growing land alienation, many actual occupants or cultivators were being reduced to

\textsuperscript{43} B.K. Narayana, Finances and Fiscal policy of Hyderabad State 1900-56, Kesava Prakasham, Secunderabad 1960, P. 16.
tenants-at-will, share-croppers or landless labourers. This trend dominated till 1930 or so. Thereafter, the proportion of non-cultivating occupants (rent-receivers) and of cultivators of land-wholly or mainly renowned, began to decline. Owner-cultivators and agricultural labourers, on the contrary, steadily increased in number in Hyderabad state, as a whole. These shifts in the agrarian class structure, point to the gradual development of the rich peasant sector of the agrarian economy.

What was happening on the agrarian scene in Telangana from the last quarter of the nineteenth century till 1930 so, could be summed up thus—the system of subsistence agriculture had undergone a gradual transformation, giving way to the new market or cash economy, without any corresponding change in the social arrangements on land. The modes of production and exchange remained pre-capitalist or semi-feudal and emerged as the major source of discontent among the poor peasantry in Telangana. During the depression even the well-to-do cultivators, substantial pattadars or rich peasants were badly effected, owing to the fall in wholesale prices. Although prices recovered slightly between 1936 and 1940, they were not even half as high as the price level of 1922. Through out the 1930’s therefore the cash incomes of all those cultivators who produced for the market, fell considerably. The price-trends strengthened the position of money-lenders and traders who tightened their grip on indebted small pattadars and tenants. A Tenancy Act passed in 1945 remained practically a defunct piece of legislation which only further aggravated agrarian discontent.
LANDLESS LABOURERS:-

The number of landless labourer in Hyderabad increased phenomenally in the first half of this century. Landless labourer did not institute a homogenous class. Not only was their caste and ethnic composition complex, but also several occupational categories such as rural artisan, craftsmen, and tenants-at-will, were swelling their ranks. Widespread seasonal unemployment and acute competition for work, kept agricultural wages low in Telangana. Towards the end of the second world war, food prices, which increased faster than the wage rates, affected the conditions of landless labourers adversely augmented their distress further.

FEUDAL EXPLOITATION:-

The origin of a ‘bhagala’ was typical in the sense that of a landless member of one of the lower castes, often from untouchable caste, who would be obliged to offer her or his labour as security for debts, and work for the creditor until the debt was repaid. For instance, it often happened that when a man married, involving considerable expense, he would become a ‘bhagala’, while his wife would work as an agricultural labourer and support them both. The wages for this work would be deducted as repayments for the loan. But wages were so low and interest was so high. The debt remained unpaid. When the bhagala died the debt was inherited by his heir, so he had the situation of generation of agricultural, labourer giving totally unpaid labour to ‘deshmukh’, which enabled them to cultivate their large holdings, paying the most nominal amount in wages.
Vetti (some time delightful called free compulsory labour) was rather different in the sense that it was raised generally from all the rest of the villagers who were not sufficiently wealthy to resist the deshmukh’s demands.\textsuperscript{44} Kesava Iyenagar 1931a: 125 often there were a number of Madiga (an untouchable caste) families in village who were hereditarily attached to the deshmukh and performed a number of duties, but these were not the same as the general levy (for a description of the vetti-madigas) ‘Vetti’ was a demand without notice on payment, and consequently there was no limit to the amount of labour that might be extracted.

Besides the lower caste poor peasants, the untouchable Malas and Madigas, constituted the bulk of agricultural labourers and ‘Jeethas’ (farm servants) The practice in Telangana was that the agricultural labour was paid in kind and rarely in cash. The disparity in payment between men and women was well maintained. This unequal payment of wages was not limited to the sex criterian alone. To whom they worked was also more important factor. The labour obligation to the landlord was governed by the feudal customs and enforced by the brutal coercion through the landlord, goonda gangs and henchmen.

Though the lower caste peasants also worked as ‘Jeethas’ the bulk of them was drawn from the untouchables. ‘Jeethas’ are annual farm servants. The terms and conditions of a ‘Jeetha’ were quite arbitrary, neither there were fixed hours of work nor was the nature of the work clearly specified. He was to be at the beck and call of the employer all through his living time,
his working time with hardly any space left for leisure and privacy. He was to attend to all kinds of jobs assigned to him.

**TODDY TAPPERS:-**

As mentioned earlier one of the ways in which the deshmukhs kept their grip on the peasants of Telangana was by the manipulation of the excise system. The cheapest form of alcohol available was toddy. Until the mid 1930 the excise department of the Hyderabad Government collected excise duty by way of auctioning the right to collect excise duty. Although this involved them in very little expenses, it gave the contractors (80 percent of whom were landlords) the right to mint money. Toddy-tappers had to top toddy and set apart 5 to 10 trees for exclusively free supply to the landlord's families, and supply them everyday five pots of toddy, and a larger quantity on festive occasions.

**OTHER COMMUNITIES:-**

Certain other backward communities, like boyalu, besthalu and chakali (washer men) were forced to carry on their shoulder men and women of the landlord families in specially made carriers (pallakis or menas) over long distances from one village to another, whenever they wished to see their relatives or go to festivals. Weavers had to supply clothes freely to the landlord's household servants. The carpenters and blacksmiths were to supply all agricultural implements to the landlords free and also carry out free repairs. Washer-men were forced to wash clothes and vessels in the houses of the deshmukhs and village officials. Potters had to supply
necessary pots to officers and landlords. Barbers had to do daily service in
the house of the deshmukhs. Shepherds were forced to offer sheep from
each of their cattle on every auspicious function in the landlord's house or
on all village festival days. The merchants in the villages had to supply them all
the commodities including good ghee on receipt of a letter from the police
patel or for any officer who came to the village.

These various forms of forced labour and extractions were extracted
not only by the landlords but also by all the officials. The worst of all these
feudal extractions was the prevalence of keeping girls as "slaves" in landlord
houses. These slave girls were used by the landlords as concubines. Thus
the vetti system had made the life of Telangana people one of utter
degradations and of object serfdoms. It had ruined man's self respect
completely. The basic feature that dominated the Socio-Economic life of
the people of Hyderabad and especially in Telangana was the unbridled
feudal exploitation that persisted till the beginning of the Telangana armed
peasant struggle.45

TELANGANA PEASANT ARMED STRUGGLE (1946-1951):

The significance of the Telangana peasant struggle in the history of
peasant movements in India, lies on the fact that it was a multi-dimensional
movement. It was the first organised armed-struggle led by the communists
which raised the debate on the question of Indian revolution. It must also
be pointed out that it was during this movement an attempt to address to
the land question "from below" was made.

POLITICS AND THE TELANGANA PEASANTRY 1936-46:

The despotic rule of the Nizam permitted neither political freedom nor any representative institutions. Harassment of suspected political activity, detention of leaders and potential agitators were such common forms and repression of a straightforward political movement was almost ruled out in the state till 1930 or so. However, after 1920 several members of intelligentsia and liberal professional class in Hyderabad, inspired by the Indian National Movement, formed three different cultural, literary forms, one each for the three linguistic regions of the state.

The Andhra Maha Sabha Conference, which operated in the Telangana districts, was set up in 1928 and began to mobilize public opinion on issues like administrative and constitutional reforms, schools, civil liberties, recruitment to services etc., reflecting the regional economic and political aspirations and partly the urban middle class and enlist character of the new political activity.

The economic condition of all strata of the Telangana peasantry had deteriorated, first due to the depression and later, on account of war. The peasant suffered under tyranny of landlords, deshmukhs and sahukars, unsympathetic police force and an unfair revenue, judicial, administrative machinery added misery to their poverty. Any organisation espousing their cause could have won their gratitude and support. The anti-feudal struggle in Telangana has to be seen against such a multi-dimensional domination-subordination and oppressive socio-economic system.
ANDHRA MAHA SABHA:-

Into this system of feudal dominance, the entry of Andhra Maha Sabha was quite significant as Andhra Jana Kendra Sangam. The AMS though began as a cultural and literacy forum, gradually evolved into a conscious mass-organisation over the years. The Bhongiri conference of the AMS held in 1944, occupied a unique place (two young communists, Ravi Naryana Reddy and Baddam Yella Reddy were elected the President and Secretary respectively). With this the ‘elite’ AMS had been transformed itself into a popular sangam, mass-front of Hyderabad State communist party by taking up the question of feudal ‘vetti’ forcible collection of levy (imposed as war time measure whose brunt was borne by the peasants) Kowldari campaigned against them by mobilising all sections of rural population. The popular response to the ‘sangam’ was overwhelming and spontaneous.

The agrarian slogans and demands of the communists included abolition of ‘vetti’ and eviction of tenants. Reduction in taxes, revenue and rents, confirmation of occupancy (patta) rights of cultivating tenants, and so on, naturally attracted the poor peasants, tenants and labourer to the Andhra Maha Sabha Conference. Within a short span, it came to be known through out Nalgonda (and Warangal, Karimnagar) and in fact got actively involved in the actual collection of levy to discount the irregularities and prevented the gross-misuse of power by the landlords and local officials. Another issue concerning food scarcity had arisen in 1946. The shortage of food was partly the result of the growing cultivation of commercial cash -crops. Until the war ended, no measure what so ever, was taken to curb

the extent of commercial crop-production. This resulted in high consumer prices and in an acute food shortage in Hyderabad state.

**ARMED STRUGGLE:**

Momentous changes were taking place both inside and outside Telangana not surprisingly, the larger currents of the independence movements were to shape the course of events inside Telangana more than the other way round. Changes were taking place in the communist movement too, both within India and on the international front. Here, the Telangana movement was of greater importance, it shaped the character of Indian communism as much as it was shaped by it. The armed struggle in Telangana went through two distinct phases. The first one, from July 1946 to September, 1948, was a period of growth and expansion, however, after the Indian Army came to the region in September 1948, the movement was forced to retreat until it was called off in October, 1951.

Vishnuru Ramchandra Reddy, was the much feared and hated landlord of Jangaon taluka of Nalgonda district. He had been prevented from seizing the land of a washer-woman, Aialamma. A group of peasants determined to put an end to such intransigence. He hired goondas (hoodlums paid to serve as guards) to 'eliminate' the group leaders. It was on 4 July, 1946. When a thousand peasants, armed with lathis, (sticks and strings) took at a procession led by Doddi Komarayya marched down the main road towards landlords estate. The landlord's hired goondas fired at the procession and killed Doddi Komarayya on the spot besides the village sangham, leader was injured and few others. The procession, now turned

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into an angry crowded, went to the landlord’s house which was about to be set on fire when the police arrived and dispersed it. Soon two thousand people shouting “blood for blood” and armed with a supply of dried grass had surrounded the mansion.

This was the starting of the Telangana armed struggle, one of the largest peasant uprisings in the History of modern India.

The incident of Doddi Komarayya, sparked off a wave of protest that spread to 300-400 villages in the same month. A spontaneous movement seemed to have emerged, groups of villagers marched from one village to the next, and congregated to discuss problems of Vetti, land eviction, and grain levies and relating to zamindari. Then they conducted processions that stopped at the landlord’s house. In this way, the enthusiasm and strength of the group remained undiminished. In a village adjacent to “Kadivendi” the place where Komarayya was killed, the C.P.I. seized 200 acres from a landlord and proceeded to distribute it. Now they were formed into wielding lathis, one male from each family was recruited for the task. These dalams (para-military units) were responsible for defence while administration was handled by committees called gram rajyams (village republics or village ‘soviet’) They supervised re-distribution of land, handled complaints, disputes and personal and family problems. They effectively carried out a campaign to abolish forced-labour, illegal payments (of rents, levies) etc. and ‘illegally’ seized land (disenfranchisement for non payment of debt etc.) Just across the Telangana border i.e., in the ‘Andhra delta’ districts of Madras presidency, a political movement for unification.

of all Telugu-speaking regions into a separate 'Vishalandhra' was launched by the Andhra Maha Sabha49.

The Communist Party decided to appeal to the peasantry to support the demands of the landless labourers in building and preserving the unity of the village, together with unconquerable strength against the enemies of the village. The communist party appealed to the landless labourers to seek unity with the peasantry in the common interest of the battle against the three leeches (landlords, money lenders and profiteers).50

The communist party promised not to touch the small zamindar or the rich peasant but shall open before them the prospect of becoming the best farmers and cattle-breeders, reputed members in their own village. “It shall not allow them to go in the way of the traditional leeches, but shall appeal to them to use their leading positions in the village to start a new life of useful labour and cooperative effort”51.

The Telangana peasant-struggle was a multi-class and anti-feudal struggle. It unified all segments of the rural society in the struggle against the ‘vetti’ system and the rural oppressors like Jagirdars and Deshmukhs as every-body without exception was subjected to the feudal oppression. The organisational expression of the struggle was the Andhra Maha Sabha (AMS), the mass front of the communist party in Telangana. During the first phase, known as ‘chitti sangam’ phase. The movement was legal and open and the mass participation was spontaneous. As the limit.


50. Numerous reports and despatches that appeared in the People’s Age (Bombay) from 1st May to 31st December, 1946 bear this out 1946 the C.P.I. issued a manifesto: “People’s Age” 13-1-1946. Reproduced from D.N. Dhangare: Peasant Movements in India, 1983.

movement became popular and expanded in its geographical space, it witnessed attacks from the landed gentry. With the attacks becoming regular, the movement soon passed into the second phase of ‘Gupta Sangam’ (Secret organ) with the people taking to slings and other weapons to defend themselves from the landlord’s ‘Goondas’. The dialectical counterpart of them was closing up of the ranks within the landed gentry and the increasing intervention of the state on their behalf. With this, the polarisation of socio-political spectrum became evident at this stage. This was articulated by the communist party through its theory of united front of all classes against feudalism and justified by its anti-colonial programme as Nizam was an allay of the British.

The first issue that was addressed during the movement, was the ‘bedakhal’ (eviction) of peasants and tenants from the land under their cultivation. The bedakhal was one of the important means through which the landlords in Telangana accumulated the land belonging to the peasants. It was also important means used by the landlords in the immediate context of the mass upsurge to coerce the peasants to withdraw their support to the ‘sangam’ under the leadership of the A.M.S. The people not only demonstrated their collective strength but also succeeded in frustrating the landlords in their efforts. Here, the popular perception of the phenomenon of ‘bedakhal’ deserved attention. The struggle against eviction was justified by this sense of moral indignation. The next issue that was taken up, was the question of landlords who were arch-enemies of the struggle was taken up for distribution. As some of the landlords were in favour of the anti-nizams struggle and sympathetic to the communist party, a high ceiling limit of 500 acres was fixed and it was decided to distribute the land above this
But as the movement developed and the demand for land became intense, the ceiling limit was reduced to 200 acres, and finally, by the middle of 1948 to 100 acres of dry land 10 acres of wet land. The village committees were duly constituted and assigned the task of land distribution. But, the translation of land-distribution programme into practice was never in uniform but on the contrary, it was quite varied.

In this context, it is worth-while to examine the popular perception of the land distribution. In most of the cases, there was so much popular response to the call to occupy the landlord’s land, despite their being notorious and oppressive. This was not only because of the fear of negative repressions in future, but also because of the progonital conception of property inheritance in the peasant view. The village community land, in contrast, was viewed as belonging to every body and the response to its distribution was enthusiastic. After the withdrawal of the movement, it was the community land that was retained by the people and pattas (Registrations of the land) were issued, where as the landlords sold their lands to the well-to do-peasants. In few cases, the Harijans were also benefitted.

This, inspite of the fact that the perspective of the party on agrarian question was radical, the movement failed to translate it into practice.
DECLINE OF THE INSURRECTION:-

On 13 September 1948 the Indian Army marched into Hyderabad State territory and within less than a week the Nizam’s army, police and the razakars surrendered with hardly any resistance. The Nizam ordered his troops to ‘cease-fire’ outlawed and banned the ‘razakars’, and lifted the ban on the state congress. As the Indian army was advancing and rounding up the ‘Razakars’-the apparent target, the communist dalams on the Telangana front acquired a large amount of arms and ammunition, abandoned by the panicking and disintegrating ‘razakar’ forces. This strengthened the rebels position, but only for a while. Once the ‘razakars’ were over-powered, and a military administration set up under the command of general J.N. Choudhary, the offensive immediately directed at peasant rebels in the troubled districts of Telangana. The superior Indian Army spared no measure to suppress the communist squads. Describing the extent of the repression Sundarayya wrote. “In more than 2,000 villages of Nalgonda, Warangal, Karimnagar, Khammam and Hyderabad districts. 3 lakhs (300,000) of people were tortured, about 50,000 were arrested and kept in (detention) camps for a few days to a few months. More than 5,000 were imprisoned for years”.

The Indian army’s combining operation resulted in the killing of 2,000 peasants, and party workers. By August 1949, nearly 25,000 communists and active participants in the revolt were arrested by July 1950 the total of arrests had reached 1,00,000. This should suffice as an index of the intensity of the insurrection. Army section had successfully liberated Hyderabad

52. P. Sundarayya: Telangana People's struggle, and its lessons, 1972, P. 199
state and at least apparently fulfilled the political aspirations of the people by ending the feudal and exploratative reign of the Nizam, and by paving the way for the State’s integration. The people welcomed the troops enthusiastically and their attitude to the Telangana insurrection charged drastically. It was no longer a liberation-struggle but became mainly the peasants ‘partisan struggle. Similarly, a year, after the Indian army took over the administration of Hyderabad, it issued the Jagir abolition regulation (August 1949) and appointed an agrarian enquiry committee to recommend comprehensive land reform legislation. These seemingly progressive measures were taken promptly but primarily with the intention of ‘neutralizing the communist influence among the rural masses. September, 1948 to October 1951 (when the insurrection was called off) was essentially the phase of decline but somewhat paradoxically, it was also the most significant phase, since it revealed the essence, the strength and the weakness of the Telangana revolt.

Thus, the Telangana peasant-movement, though visualised a radical restructuring of the social order, especially in relation to land, could not succeed in practice because of the changed political situation after Independence.

Any consideration of the achievements of the Telangana movement presupposes theoretical judgment on one crucial question, is the movement best characterised as ‘revolt’, ‘insurrection’, ‘rebellion’, ‘uprising’, (and similar terms) or as a ‘revolution’ The issue is not merely academic, it has very important implications for practice.

Taking one of the most influential recent definitions as a point of departure, 'social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structure and they are accompanied and carried through by class based revolts from below. 'Skolpol' emphasizes the necessity of "the coincidence of political with social transformation", she clearly excludes transformation where "actual change of state and class structures" has not occurred.\textsuperscript{54}

Using this definition, would the Telangana movement be considered a revolution? Yes, because it did actually transform state and class structures. Partly through a class based revolt from below in the liberated villages, an alternative form of rule was setup and land, the principle means of production, was re-distributed. But such a situation persisted only for a short time. So, if we consider a longer period, (or a greater geographied area, the newly formed nation-state) no social revolution occurred.\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Theda skocpol, status and social Revolutions, Cambridge University press, Cambridge, 1979, P.4.
\item Reproduced from: Social Science probings, March, 1986, Vol. 3 Number I, People's publishing House, New Delhi.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
MAP
LOCATION OF ADILABAD DISTRICT OF TELANGANA IN ANDHRA PRADESH
TRIBES OF ADILABAD DISTRICT OF A.P.
TRIBAL ARTS & CULTURE

Keslapur Jathra

Demsa, a folk dance of Raj Gonds.

Komram Bheem

Demska, a folk dance of Raj Gonds.