Chapter 5: The Making of Kisan as a Class

5.1 From Caste Sabha to Kisan Sabha

The West Patna Kisan Sabha was established at Bihta, the western suburb of Patna, actually in later months of 1927, but officially on 4th March 1928. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, who was to take the most important role throughout the history of Kisan Sabha movement in Bihar, explains the background in his autobiography. According to him, the Kisan Sabha obviously originated, in terms of organization, finance, and key figures, from Bhumihar Brahman Sabha. The Bhumihar Sabha was created from the aspiration for social upward mobility among Bhumihars, whose strong claim seeking for Brahman varna status had been discernable in the far eastern districts of United Provinces and Bihar since much earlier than other cultivating castes, and to which Sahajanand actively committed himself.

The Bhumiahrah Brahman Sabha was established in 1889 under the initiative of the Raja of Benares who himself belonged to the community. As were other caste associations which we have already seen in the previous chapters, this Sabha promoted Western and modern education such as by establishing colleges exclusively for Bhumihar children. At the same time, with exploring-tracing and inventing their own history and tradition with heavy reference to Sanskrit texts, they claimed that Bhumihar originally had Brahman status, hence could be domestic ritual performer, prohit. In claiming the highest status in Brahmanical order, on the other hand, their non-Brahmanical occupation of cultivation and landholding also had to be justified. As

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1 Swami Sahajanand, Mera Jeevan Sanghars. p. 173. Although Sahajanand put the date of official establishment of the kisan sabha, he regarded the period of previous year for the preparation as the origin of the sabha. But he can not remember well about how long the preparation took.
a result, a distinctive identity of 'Bhumihar Brahman' was to be created. Their claim sounded to some extent persuasive for the census officers to record them in that name.

The main part of the leadership in the Bhumihar Sabha came from 'landed aristocrats' of Bhumihars, who attempted to secure those landed interests with maintaining 'a favourable relationship with the colonial state.' The Bhumihar Sabha passed resolutions of loyalty to the Raj every year at the annual conference. In return, the government had conferred upon the party a variety of boons such as remissions of the Famine and Patwari cesses, and allotment of government services. The tradition seemed to have continued until Swami Sahajanand tried to put an end to it in the later 1920s.

After having wandered as a sanyasi, Swami Sahajanand started his commitment to the Sabha in 1914, when he was induced to, for the first time, attend the annual conference of the Bhumihar Sabha at Ballia, U.P. His speeches in the conference were aimed at attacking Brahmans and awakening the self-respect of Bhumihars comparable to Brahman as prohitis. The contents of his speeches were based on works of Max Muller and other Sanskrit texts. In this sense, he also chose typical strategy of tracing their own history to establish authenticity of their claims in the same manner as most of the advocates and leaders of other caste sabhas did.

But the prohiti issue invited a controversy which consequently led to a split and collapse of the Bhumihar Brahman Sabha. After Sahajanand joined the Sabha, he devoted himself to spread among the caste fellows the cause of self-respect as Bhumihar Brahmans. One of his claims was that Bhumihar should play a role of priest

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4 The Indian People, Dec. 6, 1906, cited from Tulika, op. cit., pp. 57-8; Sahajanand, Mera Jeevan Sanghars, pp. 151.
5 Sahajanand, Mera Jeevan Sanghars, pp. 86-7.
to perform family rituals, *prohiti*, such as *sraddha* and *vivah* as Brahmins did. However, along with Sahajanand’s aggressive activism and pro-Congress political stance, his claims of Bhumihars’ being family priest was opposed by Rajas and Maharajas within the Sabha. According to Sahajanand’s account, the Sabha came to be divided after the Non-cooperation Movement over this *prohiti* issue between the loyalist leaders with landed interests such as Ganesh Dutt Singh and Babu Kavindra Narayan Singh on the one side, and Sahajanand on the other. The former seemed to be of the opinion that making livelihood as family priest was socially degrading. One day, Sahajanand recalls, Ganesh Dutt went further and directly blamed him of neglecting education for children and youths, and of making them study ‘begger-like’ *prohiti* to put a break on their lives. When Bhumiwar Brahman Mahasabha was held at Patna in 1926, the promotion programme of *prohiti* was officially approved for the first time despite a variety of the opposition’s attempts to prevent it, and the gap between the two parties had too widened to avoid split.⁶

This *prohiti* promotion was faced with opposition not only from those who were with landed interests and the Raj but also professional from *prohits*. Observing the exclusion of Bhumiwar children from the opportunity to study Sanskrit texts necessary for the performance of *prohiti*, Sahajanand realized the necessity to establish a facility for Bhumiwar children. In the summer of 1927, an ashram was set up in a suburban area of Patna, Bihta, under the management of a panchayat, although Sahajanand was the de-fact principal cum secretary cum financial officer. The ashram was named Shri Sita Ram Ashram after Sita Ram Das, contributor of the land and fund for it.⁷

Although *pandits* who taught Sanskrit texts were reserved only for Bhumiwar,

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children from other communities such as Saryupari Brahman and Kanyakubja Brahman were allowed to study at the ashram. This flexibility seems to be a reflection of Sahajanand’s thought at the time when he began to rethink the movement of Bhumihar Brahmans which had been under the banner of casteism. Because, through his experience in the Bhumihar Brahman Sabha, a line between rajas, maharajas, and their relatives on the one hand, and the poor on the other hand, increasingly came to be noticeable. In the course of activities in the ashram, furthermore, he recognized series of injustices repeatedly committed by neighbouring zamindars and miserable condition of poor cultivators including other communities such as Goalas. Now, he felt, the time has come to set up a broader platform for redressing the situation.\(^8\)

Around the ashram in Bihta, there were some notorious zamindars of Bharatpura and Darhara in the west of Patna, and of southern Masaura, who were all well known for the tyrannical manner of conduct toward their tenants irrespective of upper caste or lower caste. In this environment, Sahajanand has reached to a conclusion that the ashram had to be converted to an organization, Kisan Sabha, for the improvement of cultivator’s poor condition. As Sahajanand says, he was a perfect Gandhian and supporter of the principle of the Congress at that time. He took a stance of class accord and considered that conflicting interests such as between peasants and zamindar, between capitalists and labourer, and between the rich and the poor should be negotiated and harmonized otherwise this conflict could be serious obstacle for the freedom movement. Therefore the aim of the Kisan Sabha was initially to redress cultivators’ grievances and thereby to maintain or improve landlord-tenant relations. He says that ‘idea of peasant movement and Kisan Sabha which initially came to my mind was completely and rigidly from the standpoint of a reformist, not from a

revolutionary standpoint... I did not understand then even what revolution meant'.

When the ashram began to deal with difficult condition of tenants and their complaints about zamindars, zamindar members of Bhumihar Brahman Sabha withdrew their financial support to the ashram. The more ashram and Sahajanand raised the issues concerning zamindar-tenant relations, the more the gap between Sahajanand group on the one side and better-off members with landed interests within the Bhumihar Sabha on the other side, widened. The Sahajanand group seemed to have taken control of the Bhumihar Sabha to terminate its pro-government and loyal stance and 'brought equality and republicanism into the Sabha'. The annual session of Bhumiahr Brahman Sabha in 1926 was a symbolic one in this sense, where Chaudhry Raghuvir Narayan Singh, a Congressman was elected as the president for the first time considered to be a 'rebel against the government'. Regardless of social and economic status, all participants of the session including rajas and maharajas were made to sit on a same flat floor without any elevation.

This internal conflict continued. Sahajanand's account suggests that it was intensified by a personal but political fight between Sahajanand and Ganesh Dutt Singh. Finally it led to a fatal consequence, collapse of the Bhumihar Brahman Sabha at the Monghyr session in 1929, where the issue of Ganesh Dutt Singh's being chairperson of the session was strongly opposed by Sahajanand and his supporters, and caused a huge confusion and heted discussion.

It can not be denied that the renouncer, who is usually outside the real society and not constrained by social norms, has a potential to play a significant role in bringing about any social change. Therefore, it is also accepted that Sahajanand's personal shift

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9 Sahajanand, Mera Jeevan Sangharsh, pp. 170-173 or Sahajanand, Kisan Sabha Ke Sansmaram, pp. 1-6.
10 Sahajanand, Mera Jeevan Sangharsh, p. 162.
11 Ibid., pp. 176-182.
in the way of social reform transformed Bhumihar Brahman Sabha into the West Patna Kisan Sabha. As Hauser says, Sahajanand’s social commitments had deep roots in the tradition of social reform in colonial India.\textsuperscript{12} He started his involvement in the society by actively participating in Bharat Dharma Mahamandal and the Sanatan Dharma Sabha. Then he came to devote his efforts to the Bhumihar Sabha. These careers are exactly what we have already seen in the previous chapter as pathways of experience of emerging and aspiring cultivating castes. And such experience of local conflicts among various communities made the participants to perceive the actual power relationship between the ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ communities, or of those whom lands were rented from or rents were paid to. In view of this historical context, Sahajanand’s decision to found the West Patna Kisan Sabha in the late 1920s was very logical and accorded with a phenomenon where some other sporadic Kisan Sabhas was said to have existed before 1926 in Darbhanga and Bhagalpur districts.\textsuperscript{13}

Initially Sahajanand was very reluctant to extend the Kisan Sabha and make it a province-wise organization. The clue to induce him to do so had come from the political opportunity. An amendment bill of the Bihar Tenancy Act was introduced in the Legislative Council in 1929. It was observed that the amendment would be harmful for the legal condition of tenants. Ramdayalu Singh, a council member of the Swaraj Party, and Pandit Yamuna Karjee, a peasant leader, then took the initiative to organize a provincial Kisan Sabha. In fact, Sahajanand and the former two figures were all that constituted the Kisan Sabha at that time. If they all had died, ‘it was clear that the sabha also would have gone to die’.\textsuperscript{14} In November 1929 when Sonpur Mela was being


\textsuperscript{14} Sahajanand, \textit{Kisan Sabha Ke Samsmaram}, p. 8.
held, the first Provincial Kisan Conference met and it was decided to establish the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha as a permanent organization. Sahajanand was asked to become the president of the newly formed Kisan Sabha. He thought that he had no capability to manage such expanded Kisan Sabha, as even the half of Patna district was too heavy a burden for him. But finally he was persuaded and was elected as the president. Babu Krishna Singh became the general secretary, and Pandit Yamuna Karjee, Gurusahai Lal, and Kailashbihari Lal were selected as the divisional office bearers. In December 1929, just before the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress was held, Sirdar Vallabhbhai Patel toured Bihar. Because of his fame as leader of the Bardoli Satyagraha, the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha organized kisan conferences to expand the Kisan Sabha movement in almost all the districts in Bihar which Patel had visited.

As far as executive members of the Kisan Sabha, at the initial stage are concerned, we can see here a very strong connection with the Bhumihar Brahman Sabha. It is possible to understand that the formation of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was partly a product of internal politics within the Bhumihar Sabha. Because both Ramdayalu Singh and Babu Krishna Singh were the leading members who had stood against Ganesh Dutt Singh within the Bhumihar Sabha. It could be said that the BPKS was in a sense successive organization of the Bhumiahr Sabha and this is clear from the social composition of BPKS members. According to Walter Hauser, Bhumihars along with a few Rajputs, Brahmans, and Kayasthas occupied the dominant position in the leadership of BPKS whereas Muslims, Kurmis, and Koeris

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managed to consolidate their leading position only at the district level.\textsuperscript{18}

5.2 Economic Condition behind the Formation of Kisan Sabha

But only the perception of economic relations was though necessary but not a sufficient condition where caste sabha was split to form another kind of grouping based on more actual and radical interests. The Great Depression which began with the crash in stock market in New York in October 1929 was to bring a serious attack on Indian economy and also had a great impact in the rural areas which hitherto had already been incorporated into global economy since the beginning of 20th century. The direct effect of the Depression appeared in shrinking of credit and very low prices for agricultural products.

The destruction of confidence in credit network was immediately transmitted to the market in London causing an enormous decrease in liquidity. The avalanche then came to India, where even small scale agricultural producers who were usually considered to be unrelated to the market economy, were involved in the catastrophe through a complex credit system. First of all, the state of credit shrinking brought a significant change into the rural area. When it came to the structure of credit supply in agricultural sector by the time of Depression, it was traditionally village-based moneylender-cum-traders who had provided funds for agricultural production in rural areas. They provided the funds at high interest and tried to buy more products at low prices as a repayment. They also profited by selling the products to wholesale merchants, whose funds were raised from local banks by mortgaging their stock of the agricultural product in their godown. This stock had been effective to make the prices

\textsuperscript{18} Walter Hauser, 'Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha 1929-1942, p. 76.
of agricultural products relatively stable. 19

This structure, however, ceased to work with the withdrawal of fluid funds from the agricultural sector, namely low availability of credit in the Depression period. In addition to the impact of credit-shrinking in the world, part of the cause could attributed to the policy of the British Indian government. A national government, Rothermund says, would have taken some measures to challenge the Depression like devaluating the currency and stressing public works. At that time, however, the alien government did not have central bank that could have minimized the impact of Depression and the Indian rupee was controlled by the Secretary of State for India and the Governor of the Bank of England, who were unwilling to take such measures so that the delicate balance of imperial finance should not be affected. Instead, what the government did was the so-called deflation policy of curtailing the circulation of Indian currency and issuing treasury bills. At the same time, the Government refrained from fiscal spending in the name of balanced budget.20

When the British Government in London decided to go off the gold standard and let the pound float freely, it was not allowed to let the Indian rupee float just like the pound and it was tied to sterling at intentionally high exchange rate of 1 shilling 6 pence. This strengthened the disproportionate trade between Britain and India. India, taking advantage of the rising price of gold in India, which was the merit only of currency revaluation, managed to deal with this unbalanced trade by exporting gold. The ratio of gold exported from India to the net export was hovering around 30 per cent during 1931-4 and 8 to 19 per cent after the period. Not a small part of the gold was 'distress gold' such as golden ornaments which landlords and tenants were compelled

20 Ibid., pp. 100-101.
to sell to meet their land revenue and rent. As B. R. Tomlinson indicates, given that personal gold possession had been used as a mortgage to promote credit for agricultural production and its commercial deal, 'distress gold' proved that there was no investment in rural area during the Depression.21 Thus, the policy whose priority was maintenance of healthy financial balance within the British Empire as a whole and its profit caused a great loss among agricultural classes in India.

Thus, these measures aimed at creating a condition where British capital could not suffer in India by preventing the fall of Indian Rupee. On the other hand, Indian rural areas had to pay huge losses for the condition. Firstly, measures of monetary restraint in order to reduce the supply of credit made Indian big banks refuse to provide credit to small banks in local towns, on which the wholesale merchants were dependent on to raise money. Hence their activity of purchasing agricultural products was compelled to suspend and they also hesitated to sell their stock. In fact they rather asked their debtors to pay back the amount which the merchant had provided them. In the same manner, moneylenders in villages also stopped purchasing agricultural products and began to withdraw money which had been provided to cultivators with huge interests and consequently led to the withdrawal of fluid capital from rural areas. It was in this situation that the 'Distress Gold' flowed out of Indian rural areas to pay their debt.

Destruction of stock with shrinking credit accelerated the fall of prices of agricultural products The prices of export-oriented agricultural products, such as jute and raw cotton, fell significantly and invariably reached down to half of that just before the Depression. In addition, foodgrains which were mostly for domestic consumption were also seriously affected by the external factor. Wheat, regarded as the most commercialized commodity among foodgrains, experienced huge decrease in

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price which had never happened before, due to the excessive supply and influx of Australian wheat.\textsuperscript{22} Unlike wheat, it had been considered generally that rice market would not be affected by the Depression because it was limited within Asian countries. In fact, the price of rice rose in the summer of 1930. But in the autumn of 1930, sharp decline of the price was recorded in Japan. Though Japan was no longer one of the major rice importer, the news of drastic price fall was enough to cause significant fluctuation in rice market of the world. In November, the price of Indian rice dramatically fell in London. The ripple effect to India was finally appeared in the next January which was the first harvest season after the sharp fall in price. In parallel to the sudden slump of wheat and rice, even humble millets which were not directly connected with global market showed sudden and sharp decline in their price.\textsuperscript{23}

5.3 The Impact of the Depression on Peasantry

How and to whom among the agricultural classes the impact of slump in agricultural products and withdrawal of credit was brought to bear upon? The steep price-fall in agricultural products was immediately directed at the middle and rich peasant who had enough agricultural surpluses to supply for the market. They suffered further because the price of export-oriented products fell steeper than imported commodities. They also had large amount of debt to moneylenders for agricultural production. It is certain that these rich and middle peasants most suffered due to immediate impact of the Depression. However, absentee landlords who usually did not engage in agricultural production, and poor peasants and agricultural labourers who lived on nearly subsistence agriculture and who were not linked to

\textsuperscript{22} Rothermund, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 95-6.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 96.
market, also suffered greatly. It should be taken into account that damages of middle and rich peasant trickled down to the lower strata of agricultural classes. If these rich and middle peasants were engaged in cultivation on the lands of absentee landlords, their arrears of rent might have reduced the rental income of landlords. Or, if they depended on sub-tenants or labourers, they might have tried to make up their losses by raising the rent of sub-tenants or deducting more from the wage of labourers.

Another point we have to consider is the fact that the amount of revenue demand by the Government was fixed and inflexible. Irrespective of permanent settlement area or regular settlement area, rigid way of revenue calculation was not adaptable to the frequently changing economic situation. The revenue authority had taken the policy that land settlement should be done not by adapting to short term price fluctuation but by considering average price for long term. 'In theory the Government revenue represents the sum that may fairly be demanded on an average of seasons, and it is assessed in the belief that cultivators will save from the surplus of good years to meet the deficit in bad.' 24 This policy made the government take certain period of time to realize that the price fall caused by the Depression was not short term fluctuation. 25 Therefore, landlords automatically attempted to meet the loss by shifting the gap between the depressed price level and high rate of land revenue onto the rent or imposing illegal cesses on their tenants, especially on tenants without occupancy right or other legal protections.

In the United Provinces, the initial response of government to the Depression was very slow and it was made only reluctantly. Though they made several times of remissions both in revenue and rent, the remission of rent was at the mercy of

25 Ibid., p. 98.
landlords, who actually did not follow the decision of Government in spite of their legal obligation to remit twice the amount of revenue remission toward rent. Rather, as soon as landlords sensed the sign of the Depression, they quickly reacted and exercised their power in their estate to minimize the loss caused by the Depression. Especially in Oudh, powerful landlords refused to do so while Agra landlords did. In Bara Banki district, it was found, already in March, 1930, that landlords, without applying to the Courts, raised rent in accordance with their revenue which had just been revised in the recent settlement operation. Not only had they taken the full amount of the additional land revenue newly imposed on them, but also they had 'gone for above this so as to leave themselves a handsome profit on the operation."

When it was acknowledged, even by the authority, that prices had fallen to the level of 1901, not 1915, they set conditions for the remission in kharif of 1931 that the rate of remission in rent should not be greater than that of fall in prices, approximately 50 per cent, and the amount of rent should not be reduced below the level of 1901. Subsequent remissions saw reduced scale of rental remission. However the most significant defect of these remissions was that nazaranā and other customary cesses which had been central issues among tenants' grievances were not taken into their consideration in calculating the rental.

In Bihar, those who produced commercial crops such as tobacco and jute, especially in north Bihar, were hit directly from the slump in prices. In south Bihar too, cultivators were badly affected. Especially those tenants whose rent was commuted to cash rent in the high-price period of 1920s also faced difficulty. Landlords reacted to this desperate economic circumstance simply by enhancing rent or imposing illegal

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27 From Malcom Hailey, the Governor of United Provinces, to the Home Members, Government of India dated 25th March, 1930, File No. 249/1930 and K. W., Home (Political), NAI.
cesses on their tenants. Some big landlords such as Rama of Amawan, Kumar Rani of Aurangabad, both in Gaya district, agreed to give certain amount of remission in rent for fear of growing agrarian agitation in the district.29 But the provincial government did not implement any provincial wise measure of remission in revenue and rent. The Board of Revenue, Bihar considered it undesirable to make overall revision of settlement by using the emergency provision of section 112, Bihar Tenancy Act. Rather it only suggested that raiyats, whose rent had been commuted after the 1st January 1920 and before the 31st December 1932, should institute a suit for a reduction of their rent under the provision of section 38 (1) (b) of the Bihar Tenancy Act on the ground of a fall, not due to a temporary cause, in the prices of staple food crops.30 Seeing the remission being implemented by the Government of U.P. even in Permanent settled districts, the Collector of Shahabad district observed with a surprise that it was a 'contravention of the distinct provisions of the Permanent Settlement to the effect that no remission or suspension of revenue would be allowed for calamity of season, drought or inundation'.31 It was not until 1937 that the revenue authority finally realized the necessity of reducing rentals of tenants over a certain area under the section 112 of Bihar Tenancy Act.

5.4 Kisan Activities during the Civil Disobedience Movement

When the Civil Disobedience Movement began in 1930, the activity of the Kisan Sabha was officially stopped so that members of the Sabha who were invariably

31 From N. F. Peck, the Collector of Shahabad district to M. G. Hallet, the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, dated 17th Dec. 1931, File No. 34 of 1931, Political (Special), GBO, BSA.
Congressmen or in support of the movement could focus their effort on the national cause.\textsuperscript{32} Swami Sahajanand decided to give up the work of the Kisan Sabha, involved himself in the Civil Disobedience Movement in Patna district, where he started to take a initiative in the campaign of unlicensed manufacturing of salt at Amhara, a large village near Bihta.\textsuperscript{33} When the Civil Disobedience Movement had started, the initial reaction in Bihar was within range of authority's expectation and it was confined to urban areas. The programme was usual one of 'lawyers abandoning their practice, and the students their schools and colleges, and of a boycott of foreign cloth and liquor shops.'\textsuperscript{34} In fact, according to Sahajanand, some prominent Congress leaders of Patna district even showed 'strange looseness' and their reluctance to participate in the movement initially.\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless the movement showed strengthened tendency to some extent when the focus of the campaign shifted from the salt campaign to non-payment of chaukidari tax. The enthusiasm gradually brought into countryside.

However, when people of rural areas, peasants, joined the Satyagraha, they were prone to agitate in their own manner and it was unavoidable that satyagraha turned into aggressive and violent attacks on authorities. In Barhi (Barhiya) of Monghyr district, 'the campaign was so successful that . . . all trace of the British Raj seemed to have disappeared, and local Indian officials were taking their orders directly from Barhee Congressmen.'\textsuperscript{36} 'In Bhagalpur, a regular camp had been started at Bihpur, where volunteers were lodged in barracks and were taught drill and lathi play, the whole routine being regulated by bugle call.' Even after the authority's cracking down on the camp, people armed with \textit{lathis} were collected repeatedly to attempt to do some

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\item \textit{Bihar Prantiya Kisan Sabha ki Report}, p. 4.
\item \textit{Mera Jeevan Sangharsh}, pp. 187-188.
\item \textit{Bihar and Orissa in 1930-31}, Patna, 1933, p. 2.
\item \textit{Mera Jeevan Sangharsh}, p. 188.
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concerted action.\textsuperscript{37}

Furthermore, peasants' national claim became intermingled with economic demands as cultivator who was engaged in agricultural production on severely oppressed condition where willy-nilly zamindars were constantly trying to deprive them of as much as possible. In the first stage of the Civil Disobedience Movement and during the following truce period, this was more the case with the United Provinces than Bihar. It should be noted, however, the United Provinces showed a vivid contrast between the eastern and western portions. Initially, as we have just seen the case of Bihar, the Congress leadership to stir up people for Civil Disobedience Movement was only partially accepted in the United Province too. As Pandey suggested clearly in his example of Agra, Salt Satyagraha was to a certain extent successful in small towns and large village centres of the district where Congress leadership was very effective and powerful. It was also observed in such successful places that zamindars, village officials, and school teachers joined the campaign. This form of campaign subsuming all classes was symbolic in that it could avoid anti-landlord struggle. And the fact that arrest of important Congress leaders in April 1930 led to the decline of mass agitation reveals the role of Congress initiative and organization being indispensable in conducting local demonstrations.\textsuperscript{38}

On the other hand, eastern portion of the province showed a different feature since initial stage of the campaign, where many local congress bodies and leaders were relatively indifferent to it. In Oudh, the campaign was started first in Rae Bareli district under the leadership of Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and it was soon extended among

\textsuperscript{37} P. T. Mansfield, \textit{Bihar and Orissa in 1930-31}, p. 3; Arvind Das, \textit{Agrarian Unrest and Socio-economic Change}, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{38} G. Pandey, \textit{Ascendancy of the Congress}, p. 171.
cultivators. But no one showed their interest and excitement in making salt.\textsuperscript{39} 'the local Congress was forced to abandon some of its chosen centres for the salt satyagraha' and the campaign was replaced by their decision to lay more emphasis on economic issue. Intelligence reports say, 'small parties' moving about the province advised cultivators 'to refuse to pay any enhancement of rent . . . because many of these enhancements are illegal'.\textsuperscript{40} Kalka Prasad, a member of the Rae Bareli District Congress Committee, spreading 'no-rent' propaganda coupled with promises of smaller rents under Swaraj.\textsuperscript{41}

Although some districts Congress Committees urged the provincial leadership to initiate more peasant-oriented campaign, the Provincial Congress Committee was initially not prepared to response to those local voices. But the release of Jawaharlal Nehru changed the situation. In October 1930, the United Provinces Congress Committee passed a resolution and directed both landlords and tenants to withhold their payment. In this stage, the campaign assumed a character of mass agitation. But, as Nehru says, the campaign was to assume class character:

Our appeal had addressed both to zamindars and tenants not to pay; in theory it was not a class appeal. In practice most of the zamindars did pay their revenue, even some who sympathised with the national struggle. The pressure on them was great and they had more to lose. The tenantry, however, stood firm and did not pay, and our campaign thus became practically a no-rent campaign. . . . In many districts it was not formally adopted or declared, but in effect tenants withheld their rents or, in many cases, were wholly unable to pay them owing to the fall in prices.\textsuperscript{42}

But correctly speaking, the resolution and subsequent struggle was to show the

\textsuperscript{39} Sushil Srivastava, \textit{Conflicts in an Agrarian Society}, p. 293.
\textsuperscript{40} From Hailey to the Home Members, Government of India dated 25th March, 1930, File No. 249/1930 and K. W., Home (Political), NAI.
\textsuperscript{41} Pandey, \textit{Ascendancy of the Congress}, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{42} Jawaharlal Nehru, \textit{An Autobiography}, p. 237.
contrast between the western and eastern province in a more clear way. As we have already seen, Agra district was an epicentre of Civil Disobedience movement in the province, where official programme of anti-British national movement such as Prabhat pheris and formation of village panchayats was duly performed under and within the strong leadership of Congress workers and its organization. Here in Agra district, the resolution of UPCC in October received positive response from both the zamindars and tenants. Zamindars and tenants joined the campaign of stopping their due payment. Desertion was the most effective way of avoiding the payment as suggested by the example of village Barauda and Bhilaoti. However, the Congress suddenly lost support from rural area during the truce period. One reason for this could attribute to the strengthened suppression by the district authority. In Garhi Shahja village of Etmadpur tehsil, for example, an incident of firing happened on 27th of June, 1931. 4 villagers, all Congress workers, were killed by the police and the party of zamindars who were trying to attach villagers' properties allegedly on account of non-payment of rent. Another reason is that Congress tactics of no-tax and no-rent campaign was replaced by the one of demanding remission in land revenue. The Congress also instructed tenants to pay their rents to the best of their ability. In the end of April, a report says that the Agra district already had been showing good indication of improving the situation due to the announcement of remission.

In Muttra district too, suppression against 'villagers' was conducted by local police

44 Pandy calls this incident as 'riot' with reference to the account of district authority. But the Congress report says that there was no resistance to the attempt of attachment from the side of villagers. Ibid., p. 176; Agrarian Distress in the United Provinces: Being the Report of the Committee appointed by the Council of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee to enquire into the Agrarian Situation in the Province, 1931] 1982 (hereafter Agrarian Distress), pp. 206-225.
45 Agrarian Distress in UP, p. 212.
46 Fortnightly Report, April (2), 1931, File No. 18/4/1931, Home (Political), NAI.
authority. But what makes the suppression decisively different from other districts of eastern part of the province was that it was directed against strong solidarity among all sections of people nurtured by the Congress. Such solidarity could become serious threat for the authority. The UPCC report explains why the suppression of the authority was so serious as follows:

This fact is still more clearly understood, if one were to know that practically there is no trouble between the zamindars and the tenants in the district. There is no question of non-payment of rent or incitement thereto. Even in the prosecutions launched, there is no allegation against any Congress worker about any such trouble.

Therefore the suppression by means of violence and legal prosecution against 'villagers' was aimed at rooting out the Congress organization and preventing it from consolidating its rural base during the truce period of Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

On the other hand, eastern districts of the province have seen the prevalence of tenant-oriented economic propaganda and many cases of landlord-tenants disputes increasing after the October resolution. In fact, it was after the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement by Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March, 1931, that dispute between landlords and tenants became more intense. Major Congress leaders continued to deliver ambiguous addresses regarding rent at number of meetings, such as 'only if they can' or 'pay only 4, 6 or 8 annas in the rupee', or 'only if zamindars give receipts'. The local leaders often advocated more openly the total non-payment of rent. But tenants' attempts of not paying rent were everywhere compelled to face fierce opposition from landlords supported by local authorities. A report of inquiry conducted  

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48 Ibid., p. 187.
49 D. O. No. 1875/S. T. from the Collector Allahabad District, to the Commissioner, Allahabad Division, dated 17th March, 1931, File No. 31 of 1931, UPSA: From the Chief Secretary, Govt. U. P. To H. W. Emerson, Secretary to the Govt. Of India, Home, dated 25th March, File No. 32/11/1931, Home (Political), NAI.
by UPCC revealed number of landlords' atrocities against tenants. Landlords in this area appeared to identify tenants invariably with Congress workers or its sympathisers, and vice versa. They thought that all the local Congress workers-cum-tenants were preaching anti-landlord propaganda and obstructing the realization of rent. In those atrocities, which shall be examined below, therefore, being Congress workers as well as non-payment of rent became targets to be attacked by landlords and his agents. The report also suggested many tenants being in quite oppressed condition, where remissions granted by the Government were made to be ineffectual and further illegal cesses were imposed on them by their landlords.

Bara Banki district was a 'typical Talukdari district' where some large estates of taluqdars occupied the substantial portion of the district. It was reported that tenants of those taluqdari estates were oppressed by not only rack-renting and concealing rent but also nazarana and begar. Ziladars and other agents of landlords openly stated to the inquiry committee that they used 'legitimate severity', namely various sorts of harassment and threat. There happened tenants' 'awakening' after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was settled. Then, for the help and improvement of this difficult condition, many tenants turned to Congress and became congress members and joined the agitation for remission of rent. Therefore, in this district, landlord class recognised Congress flag as 'a symbol of revolt'. In many cases, zamindars were hand in glove with police and revenue authority in realizing rents by means of variety of forcible method. Whoever had something to do with the Congress were threatened to stop the commitments. The refusal of thread led to every kind of oppression such as physical beating and unlawful confinement. With the support of local authorities, arrests and prosecutions of Congress workers and tenants were carried on under Section 144 and 107 of the

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50 Agrarian Distress, pp. 81-94.
Criminal Procedure Code.51

Other versions and cases of the district suggest that irregular and tenant-centred propaganda and aggressive activities were going on. Zamindars complained of local Congress workers who did not follow the instructions of their leaders and preached non-payment of rent. A Congress worker was said to have told tenants that 'the land was a gift of God. It belonged to the tenant and the zamindar equally and had it belonged to the zamindar, he would have been in a position to take it'. Such 'irregular' propaganda seems to have taken the seat of official Congress programme, because it was also reported that khandis and charkhas were not observed in the district.52 In Dadra, on 17th June, 1931, some zamindars and their servants were threatened by Congress workers with social boycott, which lasted for 2 days, of withdrawing services of watermen and sweepers. 'Fines and illegal exactions of all kinds were levied on any one who showed himself well-disposed towards his landlords.'53

In Rae Bareli district too, acts of oppression by zamindars were reported. Especially the most notorious among them was Khureti Estate which was owned by Sardar Birpal Singh, who had become famous for cruel suppression of kisan protest in 1921. Tenants of Suraj Kund within the estate attempted to file a case to get enhancement of rent set aside. But the legal application was rejected by local court and they had to relinquish their holdings. It was generally observed that taluqdars and zamindars engaged in the oppression with their agents such as karindas and other armed forces. Tenants were physically attacked for zamindars' false allegations or without any specific legitimate reason. Women were also harassed and beaten.54 Here, in this district too, zamindars' operation of realizing rent from tenants was supported by the colonial powers. On 13th

51 Ibid., pp. 94-112.
52 Ibid., pp. 86-7.
53 Ibid., p. 69.
54 Ibid., pp. 77, 115.
July, 1931, in Panwari, a hamlet of Daulatpur village near Unchahar, tenants' retaliation against a kanungo's forcible realization of rent and physical suppression led to firing by armed police who accompanied with the kanungo. Two of the tenants were killed and one was injured. Being Congress worker was a reason for harsh realization of rent by landlords and their agents with the use of violent and threatening methods.55

Strongly knitted alliance between landlord, his agents, and the local authority was observed in other districts too because both interests came to a confluence of suppressing tenant-cum-Congress workers. This alliance attempted to deprive tenants of as much as possible as well as intensively suppressed the Congress in rural area In Gonda, the Congress report says major troubles have happened only in Balrampur Raj, one of the largest taluqdari estates in Oudh. At Baraipur village in the estate, on 9th May, 1931, thikadar with their agents tried to forcibly realize rent from the tenants. The result was violent clash and subsequent court battle between the two parties. Police and judicial authorities were in favour of the thikadar, and 23 persons exclusively on the side of tenants, including many Kurmis, were arrested. Meanwhile, the estate tahsildar and his followers raided the village. Tenants' houses were looted, movable properties were taken away, and women were dishonoured by them. In Simiri village of the estate too, on the next day, the thikedar committed same outrage against women. The district authority was, by and large, reluctant to take any action against these incidents.56

Agrarian troubles in Bahraich district have occurred mostly in Nanpara estate. Agents of the estate such as thikadars and ziladars attempted to forcibly realize rents

55 Ibid., pp. 119-121.
56 Ibid., pp. 130-5.
despite government's decision of remitting rent. With the support of local authority, acts of suppressions by landlords and his agents were made against those tenants who were either sympathizer of the Congress or actively helping the activity or Congress members themselves. In village of Agaya, **ziladars** and Court peons attempted to arrest tenants allegedly for non-payment of rents before judgement of the court was issued. But tenants resisted and the attempt of arrest failed. As warrants of arrest was issued, then a party consisting of police and estate employees, numbering 3 or 4 hundreds, raided the village. The villagers accused were arrested after receiving severe beating and serious injuries. Other villagers, including women, also got injured and some of their houses were damaged or burnt down. Out of 17 persons who were convicted, 8 men were Congress workers.\(^57\)

It was reported that kisans in southern portion of the Sultanpur district were 'awakening'. Because the area was close to Rae Bareli district, Congress workers could easily come from the neighbouring district to mobilize people of the area. National flags were hoisted at many places. Since landlords were reluctant to remit rent of tenants in proportion to the remission in revenue, it was difficult for tenants of the area to get relieved from it. Landlords imposed typical oppressive cesses such as **nazara**, **hari**, and **begar** on tenants. It was also reported that fencing of tenants' fields were destroyed allegedly because of non-payment of their rents. Some attempts of social boycott were made, in which barbers and washer men refused to offer their services to those defaulting tenants. Taluqdars, in addition, ordered their men to do lathi-charge against tenants including women. Such lathi-charge was often used by zamindars as a usual method of oppression. Some zamindars tried to realize full

amount of rent in spite of the remission and demanded to remove the Congress flags.\textsuperscript{58}

Kisan agitation of Unao district was also active and Baba Ramchandra, who had left a vivid memory of Kisan Sabha movement of Oudh in early 1920s, was said to have taken a prominent part.\textsuperscript{39} Zamindars and the authority took tough stance against it. In the villages of Pipri, Dandanapur and Sada Sukh Khera of Unao, it was said, Brahman zamindars had been taking from tenants series of exactions like \textit{nazal'ana}, \textit{begar}, \textit{hari} as we have already seen in other cases. Concealment of rent was also a usual practice of zamindars. The amount of rent actually realized from tenants was usually estimated to be around 8 to 10 times of the registered rent. Tenants of these zamindars once endeavoured to complain of this oppressed condition to the district authority. On 30th May 1931, however, atrocities were committed, where many tenants suffered physically and economically. A party of Brahman zamindars consisted of \textit{ziladars} and other armed men made attempts to raid all the houses of tenants there. The party was also accompanied by a Deputy Collector and armed police. According to the Congress report, many victims of inhumane abuse were mostly tenants of lower castes such as Chamar, Teli, and Lodh.\textsuperscript{60}

Allahabad seemed to be an epicentre of wide-spread agrarian conflict in the eastern portion of the province during the Civil Disobedience Movement. From the city, where the provincial headquarter of the Congress was situated, major Congress leaders such as Nehru and Purshottamdas Tandon spread their pro-kisan propaganda. But within the district itself, many reports of zamindars' oppression were reported to the District Congress Committee. In village Banwaripur, Kahli, Kosipur, Pali, Atradera, zamindars and their agents were said to have made physical attacks and harassment on kisans

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., pp. 163-9. \\
\textsuperscript{59} Fortnightly Report, April(2), 1931. \\
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., pp. 74-76 and 170-181.
who were considered to have something to do with the Congress. More than 5,000 cases of ejectment were reported in the district alone. Zamindars often ejected even those tenants who had paid their full amount of rent.\textsuperscript{51}

Kisan activities were also active in the far eastern district. In Gorakhpur district, most of agrarian disputes reported were concentrated in the Maharajganj tahsil and almost all the disputes were over the issue of concealment of rent, \textit{ikhta}, and customary dues like \textit{kolhuavan}. Relatively large scale disputes at Siswa Bazar and Rajaura occurred in May and June of 1931 between zamindars supported by local authority and tenants backed by the local Congress.\textsuperscript{62}

Thus, the truce period was to reveal the regional variation of popular activities after the central leadership of the Congress withdrew. In comparison with the western part of UP and even of Bihar, the eastern part of UP suggested more critical situation, where propaganda of class confrontation as well as radical activism reared its head. There were slight signs of integrating the turbulent situation toward any permanent organization. On the 21st April, 1931, Congress leaders of Allahabad decided to form a District Kisan Sabha and Tikaram Tripathi and Mohan Lal Gautam were provisionally elected respectively as the President and the Secretary.\textsuperscript{63} This organization was not comparable to the West Patna Kisan Sabha or Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha which were more autonomous organizations with stubborn leadership, such as that of Swami Sahajanand. Rather, it appeared to be just like what Siddiqi calls 'Kisan Sabha from above' to refer to the UP Kisan Sabha which was formed by M. M. Malaviya in 1918.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, pp. 190-4.
\textsuperscript{63} Hindustan Times, 30th April 1931.
\textsuperscript{64} Siddiqi, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 119-141.
5. 5 Reason of Regional Variation in Peasant Activism

The peasant activism and its upheaval appeared in this period was clearly the product of the Civil Disobedience Movement as well as economic dislocation due to the Great Depression. It also inherited much from caste movements as we have already seen. The problem here is what made this regional variation appear in popular activities. Classic explanation has attributed to political leadership: interest of tenants was advocated by the Congress politicians such as Nehru who supported the no-rent campaign while it was not in Bihar since the Congress leaders of Bihar were 'Ghandians' who maintained class harmony rather than class conflict. But such explanation fails to understand the variation within each province.

But as Shahid Amin's analysis on rumours spreading among the people of Gorakhpur shows, the cause and policy of national movement was differently accepted in rural area. Even within the Congress organization itself, as the UPCC report suggests in many cases, there was a certain gap between Congress leaders and volunteers working in villages and towns on the one side and 'responsible' Congress leadership in Allahabad on the other. The former were responsible for radical propaganda such as non-payment of rent and did not cease to work even in the truce period. Such propaganda was often based on local issues or connected to particular social section to which the author of the propaganda belonged. Hence, analysis of local Congress leadership below the district level may be fruitful to understand the regional variation.

However, it is misleading to suppose that the Congress organization systematically functioned as 'modern' structure with multi-layered and franchised regional branches.

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65 See Ch. 1.
66 Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2'.
Though those local Congress leaders and volunteers, on the one hand, usually worked within the regional jurisdiction to which they belonged organizationally, on the other hand they could easily 'trespass' on neighbouring jurisdictions which, though outside their own, were also socially belonged to his locality. Thus what was happening during the Civil Disobedience Movement was that agitators, whether their designation was Congress worker or mere tenants, freely moved around their own locality with spreading their own 'Congress' propaganda which not necessarily matched with the 'official' Congress policy. Such notion is also applicable to other contemporary organizations. When it comes to the Kisan Sabha, the working of its organization was also not monolithic.

There was a good example of such cross-boarder activity of Kisan Sabha and 'Congress' in the Bihar-UP boarder. A report says, the police circles of Bhole and Kateya situated in the extreme north-west of Saran district, Bihar, had been known as 'very turbulent' areas since the Civil Disobedience Movement had started. Such situation was partly attributed to landlord-tenants relations in the Hathwa Raj.\textsuperscript{67} Swami Sachidanand, allegedly being the President of Deoria Sub-Divisional Kisan Association or Deoria Kisan Sabha in UP side, had paid attention to grievances of tenants such as \textit{begar} and illegal enhancement of rents. The Sabha was said to have 90 members coming from various villages in Deoria-Kasia subdivision of Gorakhpur district.\textsuperscript{68} Since the beginning of December 1930, he time to time crossed the provincial boundary and attempted to make speeches at meetings held at Bhole in

\textsuperscript{67} From M. G. Hallet, the Chief Secretary to the GBO, to Jagdish Prasad, the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of UP, dated 8th Jan. 1931, D. O. No. 213-C, File No. 49 of 1931, Political (Special), BSA.
\textsuperscript{68} Copy of a confidential d. o. letter dated 28th Jan. 1931, from the Commissioner of Gorakhpur Division, to Jagdish Prasad: From S. A. Khan, the Magistrate and Collector of Saran District, to J. E. Scott, the Commissioner of the Tirhut Division, dated 2nd Feb. 1931, D. O. No. 83-C; From W. W. Finlay, the Collector of Gorakhpur District, to S. A. Khan, dated 26th Jan. 1931, all in File No. 49 of 1931, Political (Special), BSA.
Saran district. Though he was not the Congress member, he criticized government policy and showed his sympathy with poor peasants. On 16th December 1930, one of those meetings attended by him resulted in a clash between peasants and the police, in which 25 to 20 persons were arrested.\footnote{A note by J. P. Johnston, Superintendent of Police, Saran, attached to D. O. No. 83-C; An English translation of a proclamation in Hindi attached to D. O. No. 213-C, File No. 49 of 1931, Political (Special), BSA.}

Subsequent weeks saw a series of mass meetings at Raikunthpur and Darzia Bazaar in Gorakhpur district, where 'oppressed poor cultivators of about 70 to 80 villages' or 'peasants of 25 to 30 villages' situated in Gorakhpur-Saran provincial boarder area were gathered. The resolution passed demanded the Bihar Government and its high officials to stop a series of oppressions by the police and Chaukidari tax collector against Congress workers and other villagers. They also strongly condemned their suppression at the incident of Bhore. It also requested the authority to make an enquiry into the incident and other cases of suppression by police, and proposed to hold meetings at Bhore or Aliganj Siwan under the presidency of Babu Shri Prakash, the General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee. Among the leading persons who attended were politically significant figures of national level such as Swarup Rani Nehru, Kamala Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Purushotam Das Tandon, and other provincial level politicians, barristers, and editors of newspaper. Though the proposed meetings were not allowed to be held by the authority, some of those who collected with the intention to attend the meeting were from Gorakhpur side.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

We can see in these mass meetings clear signs of support from the Congress. The relation between the Deoria Kisan Sabha and the Congress shows a characteristic feature similar to what we have discussed in the case of Kisan Sabha of Pratapgarh in the previous chapter. Here in this case too, the peasant-leaning local organization got
the popularity among tenants. But the support from Congress organization seemed to be significant in collecting large number of people from wider areas and in organizing meeting in large scale. On the other hand, the Congress also benefited in the respect that they made use of the local channel to spread their political agenda. Nevertheless, the conference admitted that the Deoria Kisan Sabha was a sole contact point where peasants from both of Saran and Gorakhpur district could complain of various oppressions. This suggests that the Congress organization in rural area did not function necessarily along the administrative boundaries or its regional unit, and in fact it allowed itself to work beyond such supposed jurisdictions.

5.6 Out of the Congress

This irregular function of Congress organization and cross-border activities of the local Congress workers cum peasants might have affected the situation of neighbouring province of Bihar. Since the latter half of 1931, the national campaign in Bihar clearly assumed an aspect of peasant movement or landlord-tenant dispute. In Dheccaha tahsil of Champaran district, local Congress workers were very active in spreading pro-kisan propaganda inside the Bettiah Raj. Congress workers 'with beat of drum and ringing (Charighanta) Bell wandering door to door, village by village and in Bazars instructing the tenants not to pay their rent and any more...'. On 6th August, a 'Sabha' was held at the house of one Ambika Prasad Singh in village Sirsa Mal and almost all the local Koiris joined it.71 The tahsildar who reported one of those meetings noticed what such 'dangerous people' were saying to tenants was different from the official Congress policy. While former gave tenants an instruction of not paying all

71 A report by Dheccaha tahsildar, L. N. Singh, dated 7th Aug. 1931, attached to memo No. 4131, from J. L. Merriman, Manager of Bettiah Estate, to Collector of Champaran, Motihari, dated 13th Aug. 1931, File No. 34 of 1931, Political (Special), GBO, BSA.
their payment, the Congress office asked 'to file their petition if they have any objection for their higher rate of rent to be reduced to a reasonable jama.'72

In Gaya district, 'Jugal Kishore Singh, homeopathic practitioner and a tenant of the Amawan Raj...has been using, towards ventilation of his own grievances, Congress agitation against zamindars in general.' An earlier report shows that he initially tried to redress the grievances of tenants and oppressions by landlords through the intervention of local authorities.73 But afterward, he, with other congress workers some of who seemed to come from other part of Bihar, started touring Jehanabad and Aurangabad subdivision 'waking up tenants to organize Kisan Sabhas.' It was also reported that he gave instruction in some villages of Tikari not to pay 'malguzar.' In other places of the district, resolution seeking reduction of rent was passed by kisans and petitions were sent to the congress committee.74

In Patna district, Dinapur and Paliganj saw growing activities of Kisan Sabha, which sent delegates to zamindars of the area to stop their oppression against tenants, and also appealed to the authority to make an enquiry into the situation there. The fact that leaders of the Kisan Sabha 'had to warn the Kisans to turn up in "Khaddar"' indicates the national cause already had overtaken by peasant-centred economic demands.75 In Monghyr and Shahabad district too, local Congress workers were reported to be spreading no-rent propagandas in a quasi-autonomous way.76

72 A report by L. N. Singh, dated 9th Aug. 1931, attached to memo No. 4131, File No. 34 of 1931, Political (Special), GBO, BSA.
73 Letter from Dr. Jugal Kishore Singh, President, Gaya District Kisan Sabha to District Magistrate, Gaya, dated 3rd June 1931; Memo No. 2330-R, Extract from the confidential diary of the Superintendent of Police, Gaya, dated 2nd Oct. 1931, forwarded to the Chief Secy to the GBO, both in File No. 34 of 1931, GBO, BSA.
74 Memo No. 12545 S. B.. Extract from the confidential diary of the Superintendent of Police, Gaya, dated 9th Dec. 1931, forwarded to the Chief Secy to the GBO, File No. 34 of 1931, GBO, BSA.
75 Memo No. 2361-R, Extract from the confidential diary of the Superintendent of Police, Patna, dated 13th Oct. 1931; Supplementary weekly confidential diary of the Superintendent of Police, Patna for the week ending 17th Nov. 1931, both were forwarded to the Chief Secy to the GBO, File No. 34 of 1931, GBO, BSA.
Thus, in Bihar too, these pro-peasant activities by local Congress workers, which often deviated from the official policy, were increasing toward the end of truce period. Although they were still dependent on and getting support from the high command, such regional or local elements gradually have lost the support. It was partly because the Congress suffered major set-back due to severe suppression and arrest of most of important leaders by the authority in the period followed by the destruction of Gandhi-Irwin Pact. But there was a more significant and fundamental reason as a colonial official rightly pointed out as follows

There is no possibility of a "no-rent" campaign being started in Bihar as the Congress leaders themselves belong to the zamindar class who can not possibly think of launching upon a class war in the Province.

As regards non-payment of chaukidari taxes it is not under contemplation at present nor can it be unless the Indian National Congress or the Congress Working Committee decides upon a campaign of full-fledged "Satyagraha" inviting breach of law all round.

There is a younger section in the Congress camp which wants to follow U. P. and Gujarat but moderating influence is exercised over them by more responsible and thoughtful leaders of the Congress specially Babu Brajakishore Prasad and Babu Rajendra Prasad.

Babu Dip Narain Singh is expected here soon as Mr. Sinha (Sachidananda Prasad Sinha) bar at law, has asked him to come, but not for "no-tax" campaign as he is himself a zamindar of Bhagalpur.77

Now a divide became more clear between local agitators and the responsible Congress leaders. In December 1931, Rajendra Prasad and Krishna Singh visited Gaya district and Masaura pargana of Patna district to make an inquiry on the plight of kisans and zamindars' high-handedness in response to many petitions from tenants of the area.78

But, as Sahajanand criticises, they did not take any specific measure to improve the

77 Memo No. 12498 S.B, from the Deputy Inspector General of Police, C. I. D., Patna, dated 11th Dec. 1931, File No. 34 of 1931, GBO, BSA.
78 Bihar Prantiya Kisan Sabha ki Report, p. 24
condition of tenants afterward. Unlike in the United Provinces there was no well-organized leadership which could deal with the agrarian problem. The Civil Disobedience Movement resumed from the beginning of 1932. But 'elsewhere the movement was not even started though tenants in many districts were discontented.'

The landlord element in the Congress simply advised the tenants to establish good relations with their landlords; and they 'diverted its energies to well-tried channels of agitation.'

In this political vacuum after the severe repression by the British Government, large zamindars such as Maharaja of Darbhanga, marchants, some others tried to take the advantage of this chance to establish an alternative party, United Party, which was supposed to encapsulate all the classes of zamidars, raiyats, the rich, the poor, capitalists, labourers, Hindus, Muslims, Christian and so on. They, on the one hand, convened a lot of meetings in the name of 'kisan' and attempted to draw attention of many peasants with populist tongue. Among the leading figures were Shri Shivshankar Jha, a supporter and manager of zamindars, and Babu Gurusahai Lal, a lawyer who had been one of 'assistant secretaries' in Sahajanand’s Kisan Sabha. By means of those 'kisan leaders', they tried to modify the existing tenancy laws at their mercy with giving tenants nominal legal rights.

What was the most crucial among those attempts was to establish another Kisan Sabha so that they could represent peasants and give an assent on be half of them to a amendment bill of tenancy law which would allow zamindars to expand their zirat. Some preliminary work to form the ‘fake’ Kisan Sabha seemed to be discernable since

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79 Swami Sahajanand, Mera Jeevan Sanghars, p. 216.
81 Ibid., p. 9
82 Bihar Prantiya Kisan Sabha ki Report, pp. 4-9.
the end of 1932. In the beginning of 1933, as far as Sahajanand could remember, the
'fake' Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was established under the influence of United
Party. Doma Singh became the president and other three, Ambikakant Sinha, Devki
Prasad Sinha, and Gurusahai Lal, were appointed as secretary. Very careful
arrangements had been made lest Sahajanand could sense and intervene in it. A notice
of the first session of 'fake' Kisan Sabha scheduled on 14th February, 1933, was widely
and extensively circulated. But it did not come to Bihta where Sahajanand was sitting
and it was just one day before that he knew the meeting being held. Nevertheless,
Sahajanand did not pay attention to it because he had been tired with the
undisciplined manner of many Congress leaders and their movement. Seeing the
development, Jadunandan Sharma thought it was indispensable to call Sahajanand
back to peasant movement and revive the old Kisan Sabha. Sahajanand recalls his
dramatic return to Kisan Sabha as follows:

During this one incident happened, which poured water on all of the achievement of
my friend. This caused a serious confusion in the history of Kisan Sabha. With doing this,
I spent all of my effort on it, or, it is far better to say that real Bihar Provincial Kisan
Sabha and the Kisan movement has begun by this incident. . . . On 13rd February he
(Jugal Kishore Singh), Pandit Jadunandan Sharma . . . and some other Kisan sevak
found out serious danger for kisans in this Kisan Sabha and considered what should be
done. Finally, they arranged to send Jugal Kishore to Sahajanand in Bihta. If they could
take Sahajanand to the meeting of the 'fake' Kisan Sabha, they thought, the danger
would be removed. As there was no other way, they sent him to me. Although Jugal
Kishore had serious injury in his leg, he managed to reach Patna while hovering between
life and death. He first visited the residence of Devki Prasad where Ambikakant Sinha
was staying too. He asked about the 'fake' sabha particularly about whether or not they
informed Swamiji and Karjee of the Sabha and whether those two would attend it. In
reply to Jugal Kishore's questions, they told a lie and said that he would come next day
as they had informed Sahajanand of the meeting. They also said to Jugal Kishore, 'you
also would attend the meeting tomorrow. Would'nt you? . . . Then Jugal Kishore showed
his willingness to go to Bihta. They stopped him and insisted that it was not necessary for Jugal Kishore to go to Bihta to meet Sahajanand. But when Yugal Kishore persisted to go, they became silent. This is how, Jugal Kishore reached to me in the evening of 13th February 1933.

When I asked him the reason why he came, he told everything. He also told me, 'Please come to Patna definitely'. I clearly turned down it and said that I would not go . . . but he did not get disappointed with my reject and repeatedly insisted on my going to the meeting. He seemed to have fever due to the injury in his leg. Some time he would say 'kisans will die' or 'When you go, then it will be good', or 'who will save those kisans?' . . .

His effort gradually appealed to me . . . . Consequently, I finally gave up and told him 'Take me. Let's go right now'. Then he smiled. 84

Appearance of Sahajanand at the meeting negated all the efforts made by the United Party to form an alternative sabha. Soon after the incident, Sahajanand made up his mind to revive his 'original' Kisan Sabha.

5.7 Reactivation of the Kisan Sabha

The return of Sahajanand to the Kisan Sabha brought about reactivation and expansion of the movement. From April 1933, when the Kisan Sabha was revived, to November 1935, kisan meetings, conference, and committee meetings were held at more than 500 places in 10 districts of north and south Bihar, 5 of Chotanagpur and 6 of Santal Pargana. They held an annual meeting of Provincial Kisan Sammelan. Swami Sahajanand, who had been a sole president through the 1930s, not only organized such major meetings but also attended a great number of meetings held on a small scale. During the period of two and half years, he attended total 346 meetings which consisted of 117 in 1933, 109 in 1934, and 120 in 1934. In district wise number, 88 in Patna, 38 in Gaya, 57 in Monghyr, 39 in Shahabad, 22 in Bhagalpur, 38 in

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84 Ibid., pp. 206-216.
Darbhanga, 43 in Muzaffarpur, 17 in Saran, 13 in Purnea, and 2 in Champaran.\textsuperscript{85} As far as the number of attendance by Sahajanand is concerned, the activity of Kisan Sabha still had heavy dependence on Sahajanand alone. It is also recognizable, as Hauser and Arvind Das pointed out, that the Kisan Sabha was not so much organized body as 'meeting tour' or just 'movement through the tour' at least in this period.\textsuperscript{86}

When it comes to the official policy of the Kisan Sabha, their stance in which attempts were made to solve agrarian problem peacefully and within legal framework avoiding direct conflict between zamindars and tenants remained intact up to around 1936. What the Kisan Sabha did at first after its revival was to conduct inquiry into the condition of the kisan. Such inquiry, whose contents will be discussed in the next chapter, was done in Gaya, Patna and Purnea district. Then they took up some issues such as high level and the arrears of rent which most of the tenants paying their rent in cash had to face with due to the price fall of agricultural products, damage of earthquake in 1934, variety of zamindars' harassments which most of tenants paying their rents in kind, particularly in \textit{danabandhi} system, were subjected to, illegal exactions such as \textit{begar} and annual dues imposed by zamindars, and zamindars' mismanagement of irrigation facilities and increasing fee for them.\textsuperscript{87} In those meetings, even if some criticisms were directed toward the government and zamindars, the true motif was to draw relief measures from the government or to insist on the improvement of relations between zamindars and tenants (Table 5-1).

However, what most vividly characterized the Kisan Sabha movement in this period was the presence of petty zamindars who occupied an important position within

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Bihar Prantiya Kisan Sabha ki Report}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{86} Hauser, 'The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha', p. 156; Arvind Das, \textit{Agrarian Unrest and Socio-economic Change}, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{87} D. O. No. 624/C from A. Qadir Khan, Gaya, to A. P. Middleton, Commissioner of Patna Division, File No. 163 of 1934, Political (special), GBO, BSA.
the Kisan Sabha. The Kisan Sabha manifesto of 1936 clearly stated as follows:

The aim of the Kisan Sabha is unity among kisans. Kisan is anyone whose primary source of livelihood is cultivation. Therefore, Kisan Sabha is not that of only raiyats, but that of raiyats, small zamindars, and labourers who earn from cultivation. All the three have to be united and fight against powers which are pushing them into utter poverty day by day.\(^\text{88}\)

This is how the Kisan Sabha incorporated petty zamindars as well as raiyats into its membership. The Sabha also had no recognition of agricultural labourers in this time. This obscured class character allowed the Kisan Sabha to organize petty zamindars, tenants, and agricultural labourers in the name of 'kisan'.

We have discussed in this chapter, the development of freedom movement that necessitated the mass participation to expand Kisan Sabha's base in rural areas. The eyes of Congress leaders, whether left or right, were inevitably focused on those who engaged in the most important industry in the country, agriculture. These leaders were obliged to deal with those people in difficult condition when the impact of the Great Depression became disastrous for them. Now a category of peasant, or kisan got visible in the political scene of freedom movement. But it is only half of the whole story. Kisans who had experienced the inter-caste conflicts could get loosely united against large scale landed interests, zamindars. It is only this time when the class of Kisan was in the making.

Initially this class, Kisan, acted under the Congress leadership. But it gradually became clearer that their interests contradicted with that of Congress leadership. Finally, the kisans went out of it and sought to form an alternative platform to represent the loosely united class with still maintaining the relationship with the

Congress. This was also the case with UP where Congress leadership was said to have better represented the interest of kisans. When the second stage of the Civil Disobedience Movement began and the strict repression by the authority against the Congress was conducted in full swing, kisans alienated from the Congress and attempted to act by their own. Baba Ramchandra and his Kisan Sabha, attempted its best to claim to be independent of the Congress. They sought direct intervention of the authority to improve the situation of kisans. 89

The loosely united class, Kisan, started to put the pressure on the Congress to take more pro-kisan line. These developments further culminated in the formation of a national centre for the Kisan, All India Kisan Sabha, in 1936. Subsequently, Congress resolution at Faizpur and some measures to redress agrarian problems implemented by the Congress ministries at each province, though still being conciliatory in its contents, were the achievements which Kisan have accomplished in 1930s.

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### Table 5-1: Examples of Kisan Meeting (Aug. 1934)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Major Speaker</th>
<th>Contents of Speech, Important Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7/8/1934</td>
<td>5:30 PM</td>
<td>Lakhisarai Bazar, Monghyr</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Karjanand Sharma, Jagatanand, Bishandeo Singh, and Sahajanand</td>
<td>Resolution: (1) Demand Bihar Govt. some relieves for the Depression, (2) Make their rent at least half, (3) Make the rate of sugarcane at 8 anna/mound, (4) Against the amendment of tenancy law without any consultation, (5) Removal of legal obstruction in repaying Gogri Bandh by their own, and (6) Protest against oppression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/8/1934</td>
<td>5:15-6:30PM</td>
<td>Ghosait, Monghyr</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>Karjanand Sharma and Sahajanand</td>
<td>Sahajanand spoke of remission and reduction of rent. Russian peasants, price of sugarcane, and Gogri Bandh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/8/1934</td>
<td>5:15-6:30PM</td>
<td>Nawagarhi, Monghyr</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Sahajanand, M. Reffuddin Rizvi, Karjanand Sharma</td>
<td>Sahajanand spoke, importance of kisan organization, land belongs to kisans, zamindars no right to take nazara. Sahajanand spoke of Russian peasants, election. Same resolution as Lakhisarai except (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/8/1934</td>
<td>2:55-5:10PM</td>
<td>Geeraul Bazar, Muzaffarpur</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Sahajanand and Dr. Ramchander</td>
<td>Sahajanand spoke, land belong to kisans, kisan should reject Chauthai, salami, against amendment of the tenancy law, importance of kisan organization, peasant movement as class struggle. Resolution: (1) Against the amendmet of tenancy law, (2) Apply the Bengal Tenancy Act to Bihar to remit the revenue and rent of small zamindars and raiyats, (3) Demand Govt Relief to deal with slump in price, (4) Formation of the district Kisan Sabha, (5) Fare rate of sugarcane at 8 anna/mound, (7) Formation of enquiry committee into grievances of kisans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/8/1934</td>
<td>5-8PM</td>
<td>Gaya Town</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>Purshottam Das Tandon, Jadunandan Sharma, and Sahajanand</td>
<td>Tandon: the British rule brought about the poverty of tenants. Land ceiling and relief measures for kisans’ debt should be done. Jadunandan Sharma: kisans’ direct action. Sahajanand: without self-organization even Gandhi would not save kisans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/8/1934</td>
<td>2:45-7PM</td>
<td>Gaya Town</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Abdul Gaffer Khan, Dr. Khan, Pundeo Sharma, Sahajanand, Ramnandan Mishra, Dr. Shukul, Mohan Lal Gautam, Purshottam Das Tandon, and</td>
<td>Gaffar Khan: The movement in the N. W. F. P. and the Hindu-Muslim relation, harmony between landlords and tenants, between Hindus and Muslims, criticism against the Muslim League. Dr. Khan: Harmony between landlords and tenants. Promotion of the Congress membership, criticism against the Muslim League. Ramnandan Mishra: Criticism against zamindars. Resolution: (1) Demands tenants’ rights on land (right in zirat land, right of transfer etc.) by Sahajanand, (2) Fix the wholesale price of sugarcane at more than 8 anna/mound by Jadunandan Sharma, and (3) Application of the Bengal Tenancy Act to Bihar for the remission of rent by Mohan Lal Gautam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: File No. 10 of 1934, Political (Special), GBO, BSA.