Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Epilogue

In August 1945, the British Labour Government which was formed in the end of the Second World War announced to hold a general election in India, both at the central and the provincial level, in the coming winter. In response to this, the Congress decided to contest the election and issued its election manifesto in December. The manifesto contained the following very specific but very carefully worded statement on the question of land reforms in the immediate future:

The reform of the land system, which is so urgently needed in India, involves the removal of intermediaries between the peasant and the State. The rights of such intermediaries should, therefore, be acquired on payment of equitable compensation. While individualist farming or peasant proprietorship should continue, progressive agriculture as well as the creation of new social values and incentives require some system of cooperative farming suited to Indian conditions. Any such change can, however, be made only with the goodwill and agreement of the peasantry concerned. It is desirable, therefore, that experimental cooperative farms should be organized with State help in various parts of India. There should also be large State farms for demonstrative and experimental purposes.¹

Regardless of what shape the land reform would take, abolition of the intermediary systems prevalent all over India was no longer avoidable. The food shortage compelled the new-born state to increase the agricultural production with efficient production system where peasant proprietorship with 'economic holding' or any type of corporative farming were believed to be the most appropriate type of producer. It was also required on the part of the state to show a certain fulfilment of promise of social justice in the post-independence society.

After the election in which the Congress captured decisive victory except in

¹ H. D. Malaviya, Land Reforms in India, Delhi, 1954, p. 75.
provinces with Muslim majority, the provincial assemblies both in UP and Bihar grappled with the legislations for land reforms. In December 1947, the Congress Agrarian Reform Committee, consisting of 9 members including the chairman, J. C. Kumarappa, was appointed to consider and recommend the concrete contents of land reforms to improve the condition of agricultural population. In its report submitted in July 1949, it strongly stated that 'there is no place for intermediaries and land must belong to the tiller'. To achieve the elimination of 'a large element of non-cultivating interests in land', the committee recommended the prohibition of sub-letting and of holding land beyond a ceiling, establishment of several types of cooperative farming such as Co-operative Join Farm, Collective Farming, and State Farming, and several other measures to improve the condition of and to protects the rights of tenants and agricultural labourers.²

On 11th December 1950, the Bihar Land Reform Act, which provided the abolition of zamindari system in the sate, received the assent of the President of India. Although it was challenged by zamindars in the court, the validity was finally upheld by the Supreme Court two years later.³ In the newly named Uttar Pradesh too, on 1st July 1952, the Supreme Court, with dismissing the allegation made by taluqdars and zamindars of the province, conferred its constitutional validity on the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, which was also aimed at abolition of the landlordism and distribution of land to cultivators.⁴ Thus the ultimate goal of zamindari abolition, which kisans of the central Gangetic Plain had long dreamt of, was achieved.

However, the history of the post-independence Bihar and UP indicates that the

---

² Report of the Congress Agrarian Reform Committee, by All India Congress Committee, Delhi, 1949.
⁴ Ibid., pp. 96-121.
dream did not come true completely. Many scholars have already pointed out that those legislations had a lot of intended or unintended defects such as land ceiling. To assess those land reforms implemented in the post-independence India is out of the scope of this study. However, what should be stressed is that the abolition of zamindari system would not have been achieved without the emergence of Kisan and their struggles which were studied in the previous chapters.

7.2 Summary and Finding

This study proposed that a class of Kisan came into being in the later stage of colonial rule and it examined the long historical process in a regional delineation consisting of the eastern United Provinces and the Gangetic Bihar. The chapter 2 dealt with the impact of colonial rule on material conditions of the agrarian society, especially in terms of newly introduced land system and colonial administration. Survey and settlement operations and legislations on land were crucial among them because they were nothing more than the process of interpreting the society by the Other. In doing so, the British first recognized indigenous rights, then defined them in their own way, and finally gave particular individuals or collective bodies the rights with legal validity. This modern process removed anything vague and plural, and drew clear-cut boundaries between those who have legal rights and those who do not, and thereby excluded most of those who had enjoyed a certain right in the existing multi-layered land holding structure. Although subsequent legislations whose purpose was to protect the right of those who had occupied lower positions of the multi-layered structure somewhat improved their condition, the grand policy on land remained intact throughout the colonial period. The policy simplified proprietary and tenurial titles, and strengthened and consolidated landed classes as the collaborator. According to region wise land policy
and legislations, there existed regional differences in the legal condition of agrarian classes. While tenants of Bihar were in worse legal condition than tenants of the Bengal Proper, for example, they still enjoyed decent legal protection in comparison with the worst condition of tenants in Oudh. But those differences were made invisible by a stronger factor of demographic change. As the population pressure made acute the competition among tenants for land, the bargaining power of tenants against landlords became weaker. Thus, the overall and long-term trend throughout the colonial period was directed towards a division between those who have landed interests and those who did not.

Chapter 3 discussed another type of impact caused by the colonial rule, especially the social impact of the Other's interpreting Indian people and the society. The colonial rule also brought grave social impact. Civil laws, census operations, ethnographic studies, and many other institutions based on Other's view of Indian society were implemented and conducted. This was a process of standardization and reconstruction of the Indian society within the Other's cognitive framework. Active responses from the indigenous people occurred in the form of various social reform movements which were conducted by number of social and religious groups. These reactions and responses could be regarded as a process of appropriating the colonial discourses through which indigenous groups tried to assert themselves to strengthen or maintain their social position as well as to gain as much as possible.

Then, we examined the existing works on those social reform movements and questioned a influential proposition by Jeffrelot that caste movements in the south could develop and had more significant impact by creating alternatives of ethnicized identity to existing values such as Brahmanism while caste movements in the north did not bring about any structural change since they remained within the Brahmancial
value system. Most of the studies on caste movements in north India focus on their programmes, organizations, leaders' thoughts, and activities in constitutional politics such as petitioning to the colonial government. They did not consider the distinctive feature in comparison with similar cases in other regions. What should be taken account of is social-economic position of the participants in those movements. In the central Gangetic Plain, the self-assertion of cultivating castes such as Yadav and Kurmi followed that of 'upper-castes' and increasingly became active from 1910s onward. As compared with the non-Brahman protests in the west and south where some castes groups with certain power, wealth, and social prestige at least in a locality constituted main participants, those cultivating castes in the central Gangetic Plain seemed to occupy lower position in ritual, social, and economic terms. The very fact of their being in lower status and being cultivators were to have special significance in the sense that their upward mobility movements inevitably involved some changes in the relationship with other caste groups and often caused serious conflicts. Even when these movements in north India remained within the Brahmanical value system, they were able to have considerable impact in structural terms.

The Chapter 4 focused on the friction or conflicts in more open forms, connected with the social upward mobility movements of cultivating castes. These conflicts frequently occurred on a local scale. The localized self-assertion had initially appeared in the cow protection movement since the turn of the 20th century. Members of the cultivating castes with other 'upper castes' actively joined it and attempted to situate themselves in the broader imagined community of 'Hindu' to reconstruct their identity. The sectarian strife of 1917 occurred in eastern UP and western Bihar showed that 'lower' castes including cultivating castes had become better organized to assert themselves since 1893. It also enriched their awareness with an experience of collective action on caste
Then we have examined two major movements of 1920s in the central Gangetic Plain, 'Goala movement' and the Kisan Sabha movement in southern Oudh districts. Both cases revealed that those upward mobile cultivating castes' self-assertion, seeking higher position in the society caused clashes with 'upper castes' at local level. In the former case, as the inter-caste conflicts occurred over specific social and economic issues, the participants could perceive and understand the relation with the conflicting counterpart in socio-economic as well as ritual terms. Although the latter case showed its stronger character of economic conflict between tenants and landlords, the economic difference and economic relationship between the exploiter and the exploited was sometimes experienced with reference to various exactions of products and labour imposed on 'lower castes' by landholding 'upper-castes'. Thus the caste tie of Kurmi worked well in organizing the Kisan Sabha.

In Chapter 5, we see further development in which the form of caste assertion by cultivating castes transformed itself into more sophisticated type of popular movement with broader base. The nationalist leaders who thought it necessary to strengthen the freedom struggle encouraged mass participation to expand its rural base. The eyes of Congress leaders, whether left or right, were on those who engaged in agricultural production, the most important industry of the country. At the same time, the leaders were more obliged to have commitment with the people when the impact of the Great Depression turned out to be disastrous for them. Thus, a category of peasant, or Kisan got significant meaning in the political scene of freedom movement. But there was a parallel process in which those who had experienced the inter-caste conflicts could get loosely united against greedy landed interests, zamindars. The process could be recognized when the Shri Sitaram Ashram in Bihta opened its door to castes other than
Bhumihars to hear their grievances.

Initially, the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha functioned within the official policy of Congress leadership. It represented anyone who engaged in the process of agricultural production as Kisan. The category included from petty landlords to tenants who held trivial land just for their subsistence. The attempts of Kisan Sabha were primarily aimed at conciliation between the conflicting parties or seeking the intervention of authorities such as Maharajas, district or Subdivisional officers. In this sense, the Kisan Sabha of this period embodied the official Congress policy of class conciliation or class harmony. However, it sometimes became clear that interests of the poor could not be protected by such policy. While maintaining the relationship with the Congress, Kisans sought a more autonomous body which, they thought, could represent them better. This is how the BPKS was revived at the end of the Civil Disobedience.

Formation of a separate and somewhat autonomous body was also the case in UP where Congress leadership was said to have better represented the interest of kisans. When the second stage of the Civil Disobedience Movement has begun and the fierce repression by the authority against the Congress was conducted in full swing, Baba Ramchandra and his Kisan Sabha, attempted at their best to claim to be independent of the Congress. They sought direct intervention of the authority to improve the situation of kisans. Thus, the loosely united class, Kisan, came into being and started to put the pressure on the Congress to take more pro-Kisan line. With the help of Left wing groups, these developments further culminated in the formation of a national centre for the Kisan, All India Kisan Sabha, in 1936. Subsequently, the Congress agrarian 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 Kisans have accomplished in 1930s.
However, as we have seen in the Chapter 6, this class of Kisan began to show signs of cleavage when their agitation increasingly became 'radical'. A section of the Kisan in economically lower position could not recover from the Depression even in the later 1930s and they pushed the Kisan Sabha to take more 'radical' line. The series of Bakasht struggles launched in this situation and built up its momentum toward the end of 1930s. While Kisans repeatedly resorted to determined actions such as taking away crops and forcibly occupying lands, divisions in the Kisan often appeared. In some cases of Bakasht struggle, landlord in dispute appealed to caste cause and 'upper caste' tenants demanded more land than other 'lower caste' tenants at the time of settlement. In addition, despite the radicalization in its mode of protest, the demands of Kisan remained the same such as reduction of rent and abolition of illegal exactions. Thus Bakasht struggle of the later 1930s shared some common features with the inter-caste conflicts of 1920s.

On the other hand, a sign of 'differentiation of peasantry' came to be visible. There was a precondition in which legislations for the protection of occupancy tenants, especially in 1930s, had made the cleavage wider between the tenants who benefited and other tenants. Bakasht struggle often occurred over this division. In Purnea, a marginalized section of Kisan, Santal bataidars who did not have legal protection were confronted with their maliks, small-scale occupancy tenants or tenure-holders.

Political leadership of Kisan agitations, which increased their commitment from the end of 1930s onward, also played a role to divide the Kisan on political lines. The Congress, Congress Socialist Party, Forward Block, and CPI were very keen on incorporating the Kisans and the Kisan Sabha into their own movement. The BPKS, along with its leaders including Sahajanand, swayed among political parties. Subsequently, this led to the split into several rival Kisan Sabhas.
Nevertheless those divisions among the Kisan did not prevent their activism. Quit India Movement triggered off very aggressive activities of kisans irrespective of the differentiation among them. Their desire of totally rejecting the colonial government was to be reflected in their furious violence, which was directed against whatever symbolized the colonial rule. Colonial institutions such as police stations and government offices, and their officers and employees, were very openly attacked and damaged. Infrastructure which represented technologies of the alien rule such as railways lines, telegram lines and post offices, and road connections were totally paralysed throughout the central Gangetic Plain.

The very aggressive stance of kisans and the collapse of central leadership in the Congress due to the wholesale arrest of leaders created a room where local cause could work. Although there existed several sets of instructions issued by the central or provincial Congress committees, and other political leadership, kisans could easily insert into those instructions their own specific demands such as non-payment of rent.

The peasant activism did not cease to exist. Bakasht struggles restarted in many districts of Bihar and became far more intensive toward 1947. But the category of Kisan no longer worked as it did in 1930s owing to the phenomenon of 'differentiation of the peasantry' and the political differences. In addition, various legislations, political differences, and Kisan organizations along the provincial boundary prevented the class of Kisan to work beyond the boundary throughout the central Gangetic Plain.

7.3 Caste Mobility as Structural Change

In order to depict peasant upheaval of the later colonial period, one of the focal points of this study was to situate it in a social change which had been in progress throughout the colonial period. British rule in India gave rise to dislocations not only of
existing tradition and values but also of way of social grouping and even the structure of society itself. As we have seen, one such example was the rise of Brahmanical value as the most significant and authentic value of 'Hinduism'. The British abstracted and simplified variety of schools and traditions of 'Hinduism' to make a unified compilation of civil law, 'Hindu Law', which was applied to a supposed community called 'Hindu'. This was the also the cases with other 'religious communities', all of which, the colonizers supposed, composed the Indian society. At the same time, the caste hierarchy was made to be connected with varna and rigidly fixed as unchangeable hierarchy in far wider trans-regional or subcontinental scale. Whether or not indigenous people agreed with their own status assigned by the colonial state, they reacted invariably within the framework of the colonial view. In every census operation, number of stereotyped claims were made by caste sabhas seeking for a higher varna status or names which they thought to be prestigious. When we see those claims, a notion typically proposed by C. Jaffrelot seems to be persuasive: caste mobility movement in north India remained in 'sanskritization logic' and did not challenge the value system which had been consolidated under the alien government and on which they themselves were based.

In comparison with caste mobility movements in the south, it is clear, that in the north, an alternative cultural and ethnic identity could not be created. But the movement had significant effect on the society, though in different ways. Caste mobility movements and caste sabhas in north India could provide members of cultivating castes with preconditions for their emerging in to a single class of Kisan in the following three ways. Firstly, caste mobility movements gave those caste fellows significant opportunities to organize themselves beyond existing local units and on a larger scale. By the second decade of the 20th century, the most active mobile castes were middle ranging cultivating castes which had been integrated into such 'caste clusters' as 'Yadav'
and 'Kurmi' seeking higher status in the re-fashioned colonial caste hierarchy. Secondly, with experiencing conflicts with the 'upper castes', those cultivating castes came to perceive their socio-economic relationship as well as ritual relationship with their superiors. This socio-economic interpretation of caste enabled them to unite themselves beyond caste boundaries on the basis of universal social and economic issues such as *begar* and *nazarana* or *salami*. Thirdly, the inter-caste conflicts, along with the cow-protection movement, also gave them experience and modes of collective protest and self-assertion, which was later to be inherited by the Kisan struggle. The organization of 'Kisan Sabha' was clearly the successor of those caste sabhas in this sense. Sahajanand's active involvement in the Bhumihar Brahman Sabha and his experience of preaching at numerous meetings, for example, obviously affected the way kisan struggle was waged by the BPKS.

7.4 The Making of the Kisan as a Class

The epistemological change in caste interpretation created preconditions where mobile backward casts could stretch their ties horizontally and could get united on universal socio-economic issues. G. Pandey pointed out that there had been general perception of division or distinction throughout the area of this study at least until 1940s between *sharif*, or respectable classes, including legal professionals, colonial bureaucrats, and landholders of upper castes on the one hand, and *razil*, or labouring people, including from 'clean' cultivating castes to 'unclean' labouring and artisanal castes on the other. But the enmity of the lower class against the opponent did not assume cultural or ethnic dimension as it occurred in the south. Instead, the lower class of the north, as cultivating and labouring class, focused more on the economic relation

---

8 Pandy, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, pp. 84, 199-200.
with the respectable classes as landholding class, and thereby sought to redress the one-sided relation or to improve their oppressed condition.

The Great Depression and the Civil Disobedience Movement furnished timely chance to the lower class. While the former stimulated and forced them to demand more strongly and intensively, the latter needed to incorporate them into the national movement so that it would have a broader base. Now the time had come when the category of Kisan could work with both internal and external logic. The lower class consisting of various groups with social and economic origin was encapsulated loosely in that category, called Kisan. Under the leadership of the Kisan Sabha, the Kisans put forward universal demands against large scale landlords.

Taking the theoretical model of class formation by E. P. Thompson, this phenomenon of emerging of a category of Kisan can be seen as the process of class formation through experience of struggles. This very loosely united body of people was a product of common demands, shared experience of subscribing to the sanskritization logic and inter-caste conflicts, and common platform to behave as a class. Thus the Kisan could 'define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways'.

7.5 Validity of the Regional Delineation

One aspect stressed by this study lies in its regional delineation which includes eastern part of the United Provinces and the Gangetic Plain of Bihar. By way of extracting its common social and material setting, and by way of depicting common historical experiences of the region, this study tried to draw up something commonly observed throughout the region. As a result, a picture of changing peasant formations

---

came out. Undoubtedly, there were many local differences in tenurial system, cropping pattern, harvesting cycle, soil type, climate, average size of holding, population pressure, caste composition, customs, and so on. In fact, it is not only impossible but also a kind of essentialism to regard this region as a priori delineation. What this study suggested was, rather, that this delineation was effective to analyse peasant formations in the period of the colonial rule, especially the phenomenon of the making of the Kisan as a class in 1930s. As we have seen in the 6th chapter, in fact, political developments and variety of legislations and institutions implemented along the provincial boundary of UP-Bihar increasingly came to affect the course of peasant movement. As the leadership of peasant movement took the modern shape such as in its organizational body, differences within the region of central Gangetic Plain became larger.

7.6 Kisan: Modern or Pre-modern Phenomenon?

Modern administrative technology of the colonial state standardized Indian society through intensive description, differentiation, and categorization. The process was implemented based on the Other's understandings on the ruling society. Creation and consolidation of caste categories with rigid definition and boundary were totally new features and those colonial measures promoted mushrooming of many caste organizations and their movements to articulate their demand within a system of the colonial state. As we have seen, the class of Kisan was formed as a result of these activities. Given that a class was formed in the society where capitalism was increasingly catching the momentum, the making of the Kisan as a class was certainly modern phenomenon. However, the course which the peasant movement took after 1940s onward led to the collapse of the modern class and another modern phenomenon of 'differentiation of peasantry' began to be visible.
Despite the stable situation, large scale 'class struggles', which had never been observed before, suddenly appeared with the emergence of Kisan in the first half of 20th century. While the Kisan showed a indication of 'differentiation of the peasantry' and started to be disintegrated into several classes such as occupancy tenant, share-cropper, and agricultural labourer toward the end of 1930s. Kisans, in some cases of Bakasht struggle, showed their caste based actions. In shahabad district, various caste sabhas were actively working and Tribeni Sangh consisting of major cultivating castes claimed their political, social, and economic interests separately from 'upper castes'. Judging from this phenomena and the fact of coming into being of casteist society of post-independent, especially Bihar up to the present times, it seems that the class of Kisan could not be in operation on its own and it needed a catalyst of caste.