Chapter VI

Peasant Movement, Nationalist Leadership and the Colonial Response.

This chapter attempts to examine the nature and extent of the peasant movement in coastal Orissa and the British response to these movements during the period under study, i.e. 1912-1939 and the factors inherent in the colonial agrarian structure which fuelled the local protest movements. The questions posed here are why the peasants joined the protest movements? What were their grievances and demands? How they were mobilised by the leaders? Did the peasant organisations in Orissa like the Utkal Kisan Sangha and the Lok Sabha achieve their goal? How did the Congress shape the popular perceptions and what were the circumstances that aroused the peasants to join mass movements? How was the nationalist leadership successful in mobilising and winning the support of the Orissan peasantry in their movement against imperialism? The consequences of the peasant movement and the colonial attitude and policies of suppression starting from the non-cooperation movement till the beginning of the Second World War have also been discussed.¹

¹ In this chapter, while we focus on the temporarily settled areas of the three districts under study, we have tried to discuss a little (for purpose of comparison and because of inter-linkages between peasant movements) about the peasant protest in the permanently settled estate of Kanika and the general trends of peasant protest movements in the Orissa Feudatory States.
Popular resistance to colonial rule during the nineteenth century took the form of local revolts that occurred in different parts of Orissa were commonly known as "meli" or "bidroha." Prominent among those were the Paika Bidroha\(^2\) (1817-24) of Khurda, Kondh Meli (1837-57) of Ghumsur, revolt in Banki (1840), revolt in Anugul (1848) Sambalpur Rebellion (1829-49, 1857-64), Keonjhar Praja Meli (1862), Praja Meli in Athamallick (1863), Santal Meli of Mayurbhanj (1866), Nilagiri Praja Meli (1875), Domapara Meli (1876), Narsinghpur Meli (1876), and the Nayagarh Meli (1893-95). The other popular agitations in the early decades of the twentieth century were the Praja Meli in Bamanda (1908), Dasapalla Praja Meli (913-14), Mayurbhanj Meli (1917), Talcher Meli (1911), and the Kanika Meli (1921-22).\(^3\)

These early protest movements created a tradition of defiance before the emergence of nationalism in Orissa. In the late nineteenth century, Orissa witnessed a national awakening. A new class of intellectuals, broadly designated as nationalist intelligentsia, came into

---


being. The intelligentsia as a part of their programme of national awakening, started new schools for imparting modern education, brought out newspapers and addressed the people about the prevalent social evils in order to bring a positive change in the traditional social outlook.

Much of the activities of the modern political leadership in Orissa, before the formation of the U.P.C.C.\(^4\) in 1921, concentrated on the unification of Orissa. The fostering of the idea of a union of all Oriya speaking tracts provided the "germ of a common nationality." Added to these the general awakening in India at large and the ideals and aspirations animating the country from one end to the other had produced a corresponding revival of the common nationality all through the Oriya speaking region.\(^5\) Among other institutions, the Utkal Union Conference started in 1903 was the first unit of this general renaissance and the expression of this spirit of national awakening in Orissa. The Utkal Union Conference caught the imaginations of the whole Oriya speaking people.\(^6\)

---

\(^4\) Before 1921, Orissa did not have a separate Congress Committee. The Congress activities in Orissa were carried on under the auspices of the Bihar and Orissa Congress Committee. In the Nagpur Session of the Indian National Congress, it was decided that separate Provincial Congress Committees should be formed on linguistic basis. It was in accordance with this decision that the UPCC was formed in 1921. Sushil Chandra Dey, *Story of Freedom Struggle in Orissa*, Oriya Sahitya Academy, Bhubaneswar, 1990, p. 60.

\(^5\) Two Bachelor of Arts, *The Oriya Movement: Being a Demand for a United Orissa*, Oriya Samaj, Ganjam, 1919, pp. 9-10.

\(^6\) Ibid.
By the end of the 1920s the tenants among the peasantry in Orissa were not only becoming increasingly aware of their rights on land but were also increasingly getting involved in the broad national struggle for the attainment of *swaraj*. Although the leadership of this struggle came from the educated urban classes, yet the movement got its strength from the country's vast rural masses. The recurring theme of nationalism and description of the evils of imperialism skilfully portrayed by the leader politicians inextricably linked the peasantry to the national movement. Although the *Satyagraha* experiments and then peasant protest movements did not go very far in reducing the exploitation and oppression of the working peasantry by the proprietary class yet it did succeed in making the peasants anti British and anti landlord and hence aroused nationalistic fervour among them. Gandhi was well aware of the rising peasant nationalism as a force to achieve the national goal of independence from the colonial rule. Being influenced by the discourses of the nationalist leadership, the peasants in Orissa started airing their grievances in different parts of the coastal districts in a more organised form beginning with the non-cooperation movement. The Congress session held at Nagpur in December 1920 solicited the cooperation of the peasants, students, and

---

7 Ibid.
youth and its call intended to involve the agrarian masses in the national movement.

**The Kanika**\(^{10}\) **Agitation, 1921-22:**

Mass interest in politics was not necessarily always present in the peasantry\(^{11}\) but was the by-product of peculiar conditions in certain circumstances. Nevertheless political consciousness of the peasants evolved over time. The discontentment of the peasantry over the existing agrarian system led to the development of this consciousness that hoped for a total transformation of the agrarian system. The 1921-22 agitation of the people of the Kanika estate in Orissa against their zamindar exemplified how the peculiar circumstances compelled the peasantry to be rebellious and assertive.

---

\(^{10}\) Kanika, with an area of 440-square miles, was the largest estate on the Cuttack revenue rolls. Out of its total area, 175 square miles were situated within the geographical limits of the districts of Balasore. The formation of the tract was deltaic. Its lower parts close to the seacoast consisted of low marshy and dense jungles which became thinner and higher as they recede from the sea. The higher ups were arable plains, the lower portions of which were subject to salt-water floods during storms and cyclones and the upper portions to inundation by the many branches of the river Baitaran and Brahmani rivers. The crops were liable to be destroyed and this part was recognised by the British as one of the famine prone areas of Orissa. See S.L. Maddox, *Final Report on the Revision Settlement of Orissa 1890-1900*, vol. I, Calcutta, 1900, p. 425.

\(^{11}\) In line with Gramsci's observation on peasants, David Arnold interprets this phenomena as "The dispersal and isolation of peasants make it difficult for them to combine into 'solid organisations'. They are divided among themselves, principally between those who possess land and the sharecroppers and the labourers who do not, a division which landlords exploit to their own advantage." See David Arnold, 'Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity in India', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, July 1984, p. 159; also see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Note Books*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971, pp. 75-76.
In the history of the peasant movement in Orissa the Kanika peoples' agitation starting from the non-cooperation days until the abolition of the Kanika zamindary in 1952 occupies a special place. The agitation of 1921-22 in Chhamukha, one of the three elakas in the Cuttack portion of the Kanika Estate was followed by another long one in Panchmukha elaka in Balasore portion of the estate until the abolition of the Kanika zamindary in 1952. The Chhamukha tenant agitation, widely known as the 'Kanika agitation', though short lived was more significant. It exposed the alliance of imperialism with feudalism, manifested in the agrarian and political issues of the time. It involved almost all leading public figures and political personalities and influenced the press, nationalist politics and literature of Orissa during the first half of the 20th century. The Kanika affair had filled the pages of the contemporary news papers like Samaj, Utkal Dipika, Seba, Asha, Search Light, as well as the Home Department Confidential files, Police reports, Board of Revenue Records and Council Proceedings. The contemporary works on Kanika, i.e. Bandira Atmakatha (autobiography of a prisoner) by Gopabandhu Das, Dukhini Kanika (sorrow of Kanika) by Anand Chandra Jena, Dasahara Bheti (Dasahara offering) by Ghanashyam Mohanty, Bandira Biplab (revolution of a prisoner) by Chakradhara Behera, Kanikaraj Prasanga (story of Kanika) by Ghanashyam Mishra, Kanika Darshan (Kanika view) by Shasi Bhusan Ray, Dasabarsara Odisa (Ten years of Orissa) by Harekrishna Mahtab,
and poet Banchhanidhi Mohanty's revolutionary and patriotic songs, though were quite often emotionally shaped, it cannot be denied that these contained elements of truth that depicted the sorrowful condition under which the tenants and the whole rural population of Kanika lived.

The official report characterised the Kanika agitation as handwork of the Mustagirs who were the refractory tenants of the Kanika Raj. Subsequent studies on Kanika\textsuperscript{12}, notwithstanding their limitation, provide an insight into the Kanika agitation. The authors differ in their opinion while answering that why people of Kanika agitated against their Raja particularly during 1921-22. Some see it as a product of the political agitation led by the Congress to experiment with the non-cooperation method and to take revenge against the Raja who openly criticised the non-cooperation movement and extended full support to the colonial government. Others glorify it as a chapter of the freedom movement. However, it is incorrect to conclude that the agitation was not agrarian but political one. When we look at the agrarian situation in Kanika preceding the agitation such as the feudal

tyranny, exploitative taxation, limited rights on land, limited education and other facilities, and above all a inferior standard of living in comparison with that of the British administered areas coupled with the growing awareness of the people by their frequent interaction with the politically conscious neighbouring districts of Balasore and Cuttack, we find that the agitation was the manifestation of the discontentment of a highly impoverished tenantry. Thus, the agrarian nature of the agitation cannot be ignored. The agitation was crushed with the help of the British administration. The agrarian crisis continued in Kanika though it shifted from Chhamukha to Panchmukha area. The secret Police reports recorded the incidents of exploitation of the Raja's officials and the agrarian tensions that prevailed in Kanika. The freedom fighters and the senior citizens remember the plight of the Kanika agriculturists and tenants.

The agitation in Kanika came from the agrarian issues particularly due to the enhancement of rents and cesses. The 1909 enhancement of four annas per rupee of rent in the east of Matai was followed by the 1916 estate settlement in the whole of the Cuttack portion. In some cases, the enhancement was beyond the legal limits

---

13 Such as the Diaries of the Superintendent of Police, Balasore & Cuttack, Orissa Police Abstract of Intelligence etc.
of two annas and before expiry of the time limits.\textsuperscript{15} Since the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 allowed the Zamindars a reasonable increase of rent after a gap of 15 years\textsuperscript{16} the Zamindars took advantage of this rule. In the absence of government settlement in zamindary areas at that time, the Zamindars enhanced rents through their estate settlements.\textsuperscript{17}

Protest against enhancement came mainly from the pastoral castes who were hit by the new pastoral cess, and from the ex-mustagirs who were to pay more rents and cesses for their large land holdings. They demanded cancellation of the 1916 enhancement and introduction of Government survey and settlement, and appealed the people not to pay the enhanced rent.\textsuperscript{18}

Oriya newspapers started virulent attacks on the Raja for his opposition to the non-cooperation movement. The press highlighted the agrarian issues of the estate, i.e. feudal tyranny, illegal exaction, ruthless oppression, \textit{bethi} (forced labour), and physical torture by the estate officials. It criticised the Raja for his pro-British fanaticism and

blindness of the misdeeds of his subordinates. The worsening condition of the people, affected by crop failure due to the climatic factors that was exposed to the frequent fury of cyclones, sea waves and floods were also featured in the media. It was also alleged that at the time of the agrarian crisis, in the name of distribution of relief, the Raja purchased huge quantity of rice at a low price from the rich tenants but sold the rice at higher prices. He provided *takavi* loans with 12.5 percent interest, and in case of failure in repayment took to punishment and illegal confiscation of property.¹⁹

The Kanika affair was greatly influenced by the changing political scenario. Gandhi's Orissa visit in March 1921 encouraged the activists of the non-cooperation movement. The Raja congratulated his people for remaining unaffected by the movement. The Congress took it as a challenge. Agitation began in Kanika with the visit of a saintly looking Ramdas Babaji. He exhorted people not to pay rent and not to cooperate with the Raja and to implement the non-cooperation programme.²⁰ Congress leaders like Laxminarayan Sahu, Banchhanidhi Das, Jadumani Mangraj, Sarala Das, Attal Bihari

---


²⁰ *Samaja*, 24.9.1921.
Acharya, Ekram Rassul, the Vice-President of UPCC and Bhagirathi Mohapatra, the Secretary of UPCC visited Kanika to inspire people. 21

With the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement on 12 February 1922, UPCC directed the Congress workers not to interfere with the Kanika affairs and advised the people to expedite the payment of rent. 22 This opportunity was grabbed by the group of Dinabandhu Khandayat Rai who took the leadership and turned the agitation more militant. 23 They boycotted and attacked the loyalists and the rent payers, violated laws and formed village and arbitration sabhas. On 18 April 1922 they snatched away prisoners from the police. 24 Having got the full support of the government the Raja handed over the matter to the police. The S.P. of Cuttack confronted the mob on 23 April 1922. The S.P. was told by the Raja's men that the agitators were coming to attack the police. The police fired on the mob in which Bisuni Madhual and Basu Sethi were killed and 24 fell injured. This was followed by the arrest of the agitators and ejectment of defaulters, house looting of agitating tenants and confiscation of their properties. 25 The agitation collapsed but did not die. It raised its head

21 Seba, 1.10.1921.
22 Search Light, 19.201922.
25 Gayadhar Behera, op.cit., pp. 59-64.
under the leadership of Chakradhar Behera in the Panchamukha area later.26

**The Peasant Movement:**

While it is a truism that the peasants were not rebellious or assertive all the time and that the greater part of their time and energy was devoted to their own subsistence and day today work,27 as the anti colonial movement gained momentum in the late colonial period a significant part was taken by the peasants. Their participation in large numbers in various political meetings and spontaneous response to the nationalist discourse by way of refusal to pay illegal taxes to their landlords, participation in no rent campaigns or placing demand for reduction of rent and asserting their rights over trees on their own land etc. provide evidence in support of this view.28

The peasant question in India formed part of a wider question of the struggle against British imperialism.29 The leaders sympathetic to the peasants cause particularly the socialists and the leftists identified

---

26 The Kanika agitation gives a picture of the consequences of the zamindary settlement of the British. Orissa had numerous small and big zamindaries, Princely States and area (Khasmahals) directly administered by the British and the temporarily settled areas in the districts of Balasore Cuttack and Puri. As the present study is limited to the temporarily settled areas mentioned above a detail study of the Kanika Zamindary is beyond its scope. However a general comparison of the agrarian condition and protests in the Zamindary & Garhjat areas gives a picture of the peculiar agrarian structure under which the Oriya people lived during the colonial rule. The ideas of protest movements appealed the peasantry in all these areas in which the people from the coastal belt took the lead.
27 David Arnold, 'Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity...', op.cit., p. 169.
29 Z.A. Ahmad, The Agrarian Problem in India, A General Survey, Political and Economic Information Department of the All India Congress Committee, Allahbad, 1937, p. 45.
and understood the agrarian question to be central to the agenda of total transformation of Indian society and economy. First came the mobilisation, then collective action in terms of bringing popular demands to the Government for redressal and when they failed to get sympathy from the colonial rulers the call was given to break the law either directly or the peasants and tribal were indirectly instigated to break law and support was provided to them by the leaders.\textsuperscript{30} The Congress and the peasant leaders of Orissa in their speeches touched upon the issues that were relevant to the existing problems of the peasantry. They also talked of the future prospects of the peasantry if India is made free from the colonial rule. They promised the peasantry a fair treatment in independent India where even the children of the kisans will have equal right and opportunity to pursue education and have a better prospect of personal growth.

There were several examples of such deliberations to the peasantry that urged them for large-scale participation in the national struggle. After the 1937 election, leaders of different groups spontaneously took up the cause of the peasantry and mobilised the peasants to participate in political meetings, rallies, etc. From 1936 to 1939 we find there were many peasant meetings, political conferences and Congress meeting in which the agrarian issues and the problems

\textsuperscript{30} This point is explained in the section dealing with the progress of the peasant movement particularly in reference to Sukinda.
faced by the peasants were hotly debated. Hardly any meeting was there that ignored the agrarian issues and peasant participation. For example in the Khurda Youth Conference held on 5 June 1938, S.S. Batliwala said that the tricolour and the red flags represented Congress, and the Kisans and labourers respectively. Their combined force would cut the heads of the Britishers and exterminate them. The sign of the hammer and a sickle in the middle of the Red flag symbolised the labourers and kisans respectively. The kisan might have killed several snakes by their sickles and so were the cases with the labourers who would have hammered a lot. They should not miss the coming opportunity when they would be required to crush the colonial power with their combined efforts. The war against imperialism was meant for setting the country free. There should be no rest until the final goal of independence was achieved.31 Hence the participation of the peasants in the peasant movement and the broader national movement may be seen as an outcome of the existing agrarian discontentment on the one hand and the growing political consciousness meticulously filtered down by the national as well as

31 Speech of S.S. Batliwala at Khurda Youth Conference held on 5 June 1938, in Govt. of Orissa, Home, Special Section, F.No.149-B, 1938.
the local leaders who identified the British rule as the root of all evils.\footnote{In this context Pabitra Mohan Pradhan (leader of the Praja Mandal Movement in Talcher) recollects that Gandhi's conviction - that the British rule was the root cause of all miseries and exploitation in India and if roots of this miseries were caught down the branches of this, such as the Rajas and the Zamīndars, would automatically fall down had an electrifying effect on the peasantry both in British Orissa and the States. See Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, \textit{Mukti Pathe Sainika} (autobiography in Oriya), Navjivan Press, first published in 1949, revised edition, 1979, p. 53.}

\textbf{Methods of Mobilisation:}

The peasant mobilisation was evoked by the action of the leaders of the national movement and parties.\footnote{L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph, 'Determinants and varieties of Agrarian Mobilization', in Meghnad Desai et.al.,(eds.), \textit{Agricultural Productivity in South Asia}, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984, p. 287.} It occurred in the micro context at the village or regional level and at the provincial level.\footnote{See Ibid.} One of the important tools used by the leaders in Orissa to mobilise the masses was through their speeches on the occasion of various annual days such as \textit{shradha} (death anniversary) of important political leaders like Pandit Gopabandhu Das\footnote{See Govt. of Orissa, \textit{Home Dept., Special Section}, Fortnightly Confidential Report from Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary, 22 July 1937 (OSA, ACC. No.630-confidential).} on 7 July, Balgangadhar Tilak\footnote{Ibid., 9 August 1937.} on 1 August, Commemoration day of Salt Satyagraha campaign,\footnote{Ibid., 22 July 1937.} on 13 July, All India Andaman Day\footnote{Ibid., 9 September 1937.} on 22 August, Birthday of Mahatma Gandhi on 2 October, Shramika Divas (Labourer Day) on 1 May\footnote{See Govt. of Orissa, \textit{Home Dept., Special Branch}, Fortnightly Confidential Report from Collector of Puri, 9 May 1937 (ACC. No.640 TF Unit papers).} etc.
Krishak Day was also celebrated on 1 September. On these occasions, speeches were delivered regarding British administrative and economic policy. Many provocative speeches were also made at these celebrations. For instance, Priyanath Sarkar, an educated man of Balasore on the celebration of the Ministry day and death anniversary of Bal Gangadhar Tilak on 1 August 1937 said, "The principles of British administration are to offer nectar with one hand and poison with the other. It is with this policy that the Britishers have kept 35 millions of Indians under subjugation. They have been sucking our blood just as leeches do."

These celebrations were utilised for strengthening Congress propaganda. National songs were chanted to arouse patriotism. The meetings were preceded by group kirtans in order to create awareness among the masses. Slogans like 'Chasi Mulia Ki Jay' (victory to the peasants, labourers), 'Bande Mataram', 'Biplav Ki Jay'

---

40Ibid.
41Extract of Speech of Priyanath Sarkar in ibid.
42See Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Branch, D.O.No.296-C, 10 October 1937, Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary (ACC No.630 confidential OSA).
43Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Branch, D.O.No.286/C, 25 September 1937, Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary (OSA ACC No.630 confidential). In the fifth session of the Utkal Provincial Conference, one resolution was passed for observing 1 March as the Martyr Day. See Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Section, Memo No.1176-80 S.B., 25 May 1938, S.P. CID, Orissa to Chief Secretary (ACC No.655 TF); also see Harijan (Poona), 19 October 1934.
44See Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Branch, D.O.No.332/C, 25 November 1937, Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary (ACC No.630 confidential OSA). Criminal Investigation Dept., Special Branch, Memo No.1176-80 S.B., 25 May 1938, Superintendent of Police CID to Secretary to the Governor of Orissa (ACC No.655 TF Unit papers).
(victory to the revolution), ‘Inquilab zindabad’ were raised to inculcate unity among the masses.\textsuperscript{45} The nationalist leadership urged the people to fix up the connection that existed between the culture of the Oriyas and the Indian culture as a whole and to elevate their position to live as Indians.\textsuperscript{46}

The Congress leaders gave thrust to organise political training camps. Such camps were organised in various places. The participants in the training camps were delivered lectures in Geography and History. They were taught Indian History on themes like Shivaji’s rise to power, the Sepoy Mutiny, Jallianwala Bagh massacre and on British exploitation of India.\textsuperscript{47} This helped the Congress to propagate their ideas of nationalism and anti-colonial struggle among the wider section of rural people.\textsuperscript{48}

Kisan week was celebrated in the first week of September starting with the Kisan Day on 1 September. On this occasion, lectures were delivered on the local problems and resolutions were

\textsuperscript{45} See Report on Khurda Youth Conference held on 5 June 1938, in Govt. of Orissa, \textit{Home Dept. Special Section}, F.No.149-B, 1938.

\textsuperscript{46} This was part of the Speech of Gopabandhu Chaudhury in the Fifth Session of the Utkal Provincial Political Conference held at Cuttack in May 1938.

\textsuperscript{47} Govt. of Orissa, \textit{Home Dept., Special Section}, D.O.No.1691-C, 17 May 1939, fortnightly confidential Report for first half of May 1939 from Collector of Cuttack to Chief Secretary (ACC No.1176-confidential, OSA).

\textsuperscript{48} As K.N. Panikkar puts it..."the need to confront the past was heir to a long cultural tradition" and..."retrieval of history became an important aspect of the anti-colonial agenda." K. N. Panikkar, \textit{Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and social consciousness in India}, Tulika, New Delhi, 1995 (reprint 1998), pp. 108-112.
passed demanding relief to the raiyats by the Government.\textsuperscript{49} Congress and Kisan activities continued side by side after the Congress ministry was formed.\textsuperscript{50} Meetings were held which advocated issues like boycott of foreign goods, cultivation of cotton and promotion of indigenous industries, reduction of land revenue by one anna and six pies per Rupee, removal of untouchability, withdrawal from payment of \textit{abwabs}, etc. Such meetings were usually held at weekly markets\textsuperscript{51} because of two reasons, i.e. it was easy to get together a number of people at such places and secondly those people who came to the weekly markets were mostly locals from nearby villages who carried the ideas and messages from the leaders to their villages.

Public meetings were held at the Lion's Gate of famous Jagannath Temple where large number of people from various parts as well as from the locality assembled for the holy \textit{darshan} of Lord Jagannath, everyday. Leaders chose that place for propagating their ideas to a larger audience. They discussed on the political situation of the country, and ideas of nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. They cited examples of other British colonies like Canada, Australia, and South Africa who had refused help to the

\textsuperscript{49} Govt. of India, Home Dept., Political Branch, F.No.18 September 1941 Fortnightly Confidential Report from Chief Secretary, Govt. of Orissa to Secretary, Home Dept., Govt. of India.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Krushak}, 26. 9. 1938, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{51} Report on Political Speeches, Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Section, D.O.No.343/C, 10 December 1937, Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary (ACC No.630 Confidential OSA).
British Government on the event of a Second World War.⁵² The speeches instigated the people to take revenge against the Britishers, zamindars and Rajas, who were responsible for their miseries, by launching a strong fight against the British Imperialism.⁵³ At the same time, they urged the people of all categories to join Congress and work for the common goal.⁵⁴ Thus, the political leaders directed their attention and energy for the cause of the peasants and succeeded in making them widely aware about the economic and political affairs of the country.⁵⁵

**The Utkal Kisan Sangha and the Peasant Movement:**

The peasants interpreted the nationalist movement for attainment of *Swaraj* in terms of a struggle against heavy land tax⁵⁶ and exploitation by the intermediary class, which undoubtedly

---

⁵² Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Section, F.No.149-B, 1938 (TF Unit Papers ACC No. 655).
⁵³ Ibid. In this context, Bipan Chandra explains that "A distinguishing feature of the Indian National Movement from its beginning in the 1880's is that it was based on a full understanding of the exploitative and underdeveloping character of colonialism. The central or primary contradiction between the Indian people and colonialism or the colonial state was clearly perceived first in the economic sphere and then gradually in the political and social spheres". Bipan Chandra, "Nationalist Historians Interpretation of the Indian National Movement", in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar eds., *Situating Indian History for Sarvapalli Gopal*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, pp.195-196.
⁵⁴ Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Section, Fortnightly Confidential Report from Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary, 24 August 1937 (OSA ACC. No.630 confidential).
⁵⁵ Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Section, Fortnightly Confidential Report from Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary, 10.November 1937.
⁵⁶ A.N.Das, op.cit., p. 54; *Krushak*, 28 May 1938, p. 10.
strengthened the national movement. The 1930's witnessed a nationwide awakening of Indian peasants on their own strength and capacity to organise themselves to ameliorate their socio-economic conditions. During this decade, the formation of the Congress Ministry in 1937 gave a new direction to the peasant movement. The Ministry introduced various kinds of agrarian legislation (as has been discussed in chapter 5) for securing security of tenure to tenants, rights over trees etc. This provided an impetus for the mobilisation of the peasantry either in support of the proposed legislation or for asking for changes in its content.

Though most part of the colonial India had already witnessed sporadic peasant uprisings before 1920 yet the role played by the peasantry in the non-cooperation movement brought to the picture the potential of the peasant masses in the struggle against imperialism. After the civil disobedience movement, there emerged a socialist trend in the Congress. The socialists underlined the need to have a fighting front for the peasants. Because of this, many peasant organisations sprang up all over India in the 1930's. A powerful section of the Congress belonged to the socialist group who championed the cause of

---


the peasants in Orissa and formed the Utkal Provincial Kisan Sangha in 1935. Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Orissa on 10 November 1936 brought new enthusiasm among the nationalist leaders especially the socialists and deeply influenced the psyche of the peasants. Nehru attacked the zamindary system of Orissa in almost all his speeches and pointed out that the British and the zamindari system of administration was like two grinding stones between which the peasants were ground to poverty. He said that the peasants must organise under the Congress banner and form their own committees and fight against British imperialism for a revolutionary change in the system of administration. This institutionalised the agitation of the peasantry against the wrongs done by the British colonialism and established the importance of the mass movement in achieving *swaraj*.

A separate province of Orissa on linguistic basis was inaugurated on 1 April 1936. As the government decided to implement the provincial autonomy envisaged in the Act of 1935, it declared elections in January 1937. During the electioneering campaign, the Congress aimed at winning the support of the peasants for which it approved the

---

60 Government of India, Home Department, Political Branch, F. No. 4/38/1936; The Socialists along with the Communists provided revolutionary spirit and consciousness to the peasant movement. See Rakesh Gupta, *Bihar Peasantry and The Kisan Sabha (1936-1947)*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p. 248.

61 Ibid.

manifesto of the Kisan Sangha.\textsuperscript{63} The Kisan Sangha manifesto stated that final solution of the problem of poverty in India was the end of British exploitation and a through change in the land tenure and revenue system.\textsuperscript{64} The Sangha also wanted the elimination of all intermediaries between the state and the cultivator.\textsuperscript{65} The Kisan Sangha also put pressure on the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee to incorporate the abolition of the zamindary system in its election manifesto. This interaction between the Kisan Sangha and the Congress and their mutual accommodation before the 1937 election enhanced the prestige of both the Congress and the Kisan Sangha\textsuperscript{66} and it was well received in the countryside.

The general tendency of the peasant movement in Orissa led by the Utkal Provincial Kisan Sangha from 1936 to 1939 was primarily anti-landlordism. The gradual development of socialistic thinking both within the Congress and the Kisan Sangha advanced the common goal of abolition of the zamindary system at least until the formation of the Congress Ministry in July 1937\textsuperscript{67}, after which there was a marked change in the Congress attitude towards the Zamindars.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Amrit Bazar Patrika}, 13 November 1936.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Biswamoy Pati, \textit{Resisting Dominion...} op.cit. p. 86.
\textsuperscript{67} Government of Orissa, Home Department, Special Section, F. No. 158 / 1937, Note of Under Secretary, 16. 6. 1937.
\textsuperscript{68} The change in the Congress Policy towards the Zamindars noticed during the Congress Ministry from July 1937 to November 1939. This aspect has been discussed later in this chapter.
The second Session of the Utkal Provincial Kisan Conference was held at Puri on 15 November 1937 soon after the visit of Jawaharlal Nehru. The conference was a landmark in the history of the peasant movement in Orissa as it outlined the line of action that the Kisan Sangha would adopt in its struggle against the colonial and feudal authorities. Swami Sahajananda Saraswati, noted peasant leader from Bihar presided over the conference. About 3000 peasants attended the conference. Loknath Mishra who was the Chairman of the Reception Committee outlined the position of the Kisan Sangha through his frontal attack on landlordism and asking for its abolition.

Resolutions that were passed in the Conference stated that raiyats should have full rights over the lands, which they cultivated. It upheld the abolition of the zamindari system for the social and economic development of the peasantry. The other demands included the reduction of land revenue and water rates, transfer of the land to the tiller, boycott of the Government in case it declared war and formation of peasants defence committees to guard against the oppression of the zamindars.69 The resolutions passed in that conference was based on the All India Kisan Manifesto adopted by the All India Kisan Committee at Bombay on 21 August 1936. 70

---

69 K.M. Patra, op.cit., p. 96; Biswamoy Pati,' Of Movements...op.cit., p. 68.
70 Government of Orissa, Home Department, Special Section, F.No.158/01937, Note of Under Secretary, 16. 6. 1937.
The impact of the conference on the peasants could be noticed from the fact that a day after the conference a number of peasants visited the Sub-Divisional Officer of Puri and put forth various demands. Some of the most important and immediate demands were the removal of the salt tax, strengthening of certain embankments and stopping the oppression of certain zamindars.\footnote{Government of India, \textit{Home Department, Political Branch}, F.No.8/11/ 1936, Fortnightly Report from Orissa for the month of Nov. 1936.} This act symbolised the hopes generated by the Kisan Sangha and the desire of the peasantry to seek redressal of their grievances from the colonial authorities\footnote{Biswa moy Pati, "Of Movements, op.cit., p. 68.} through an organised and joint action.

**Progress of the Peasant Movement:**

The Kisan Sangha in Orissa enjoyed the patronage of the Congress leaders and activists. The eminent Congress leaders with noticeable left leanings used the platform of the Kisan Sangha to enroll more members into the Congress. The peasants were called on to strengthen the Congress by enrolling as members on payment of four annas.\footnote{Report of the C.I.D. Reporter Inspector, 15/6/ 1937, Government of Orissa, \textit{Home Department, Special Section}, F.No.158/ 1937.}

On 20 March 1937, a meeting was held in the house of Raghunath Mahapatra at Bhubaneswar, which was attended by local Congressmen like Digambar Srichandan, Nirakar Mangaraj, Kulamani Das, Bali Sahu and Banchhanidhi Nanda attended it. They decided to
organise Krishak Sanghas at village level consisting of members in each Chaukidari Union and to encourage people to join the Sangha on payment of half anna as monthly membership subscription. Decision was also taken to supply newspaper to every village and to start village reconstruction work.74

A peasant conference was organised at Bhubaneswar on 27 March 1937 under the presidency of Harekrishna Mahtab. In the conference, speeches were delivered against the Government of India Act 1935 and the new Constitution and the people were asked to observe hartal (strike) on 1 April 193775 when the Interim Ministry led by the Maharaja of Parlakimedi was to take oath of office.76 Another peasant conference was held at Balanga, Nimapara on 17 April 1937 that was attended by 2,000 peasants. The proceedings commenced with an Oriya song called "Chasi Gita"(song of the peasants) which depicted the miserable condition of the peasants. In order to strengthen the Kisan Sangha the conference called upon the peasants to give priority to the following issues, i.e.77

74 Govt. of Orissa, Home Department, Special Branch, Fortnightly Confidential Report, 5 April 1937, from Collector of Puri to Chief Secretary (Towards Freedom Unit Papers, N.A.I. Accession No. 640)
75 The first anniversary of the formation of a separate Orissa Province was celebrated on 1 April 1937. On this day the Interim Ministry assumed office; See Ibid.
76 See Govt. of Orissa, Home Department, Special Section, Fortnightly Confidential Report, 5 April 1937, Collector of Puri to Chief Secretary.
77 Confidential fortnightly report From Collector of Puri, 24.4. 1937 in Ibid.
(a) Every raiyat would enlist himself as a member of the Krishak Sangha and primary Krishak Sangha would be formed in every village.

(b) To initiate strong and very widespread agitation all over the district to get remission of land revenue at the rate of Re.0-8-0 per acre.

(c) Demand of all kinds of illegal exaction levied by zamindars and his men be resented and stopped and brought to the notice of the authorities.

(d) Not to pay rents to zamindars and muqaddams without rent receipts.

(e) Not to go to the zamindars kuchery (office) for arbitration of any dispute in the village.

The conference strongly condemned the Governor of Orissa for not appointing the ministers from the Congress majority party and vehemently denounced the conduct and action of the Maharaja of Parlakhimedi who did not enjoy majority support in the Assembly to form the Ministry. The Maharaja was further criticised as representative of proprietors' interests.78 However, the conference underlined the basic aim of the Kisan Sangha to fight for the cause of the peasantry. While giving due weight to the growing sympathetic

78 Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Section, Fortnightly Confidential Report, 24 April 1937, Collector of Puri to Chief Secretary.
attitude of the Congress, the Kisan Sangha leaders expressed their hope that the Congress could serve the cause of the peasantry.

The Left wing Congress leaders while encouraging the peasant movement urged them to be fearless and not to submit tamely to the illegal exaction of the zamindars. In the first quarter of 1937, there was wider resentment among the tenants in Parikud against the illegal exaction of the Raja of Parikud. The leaders of the peasant movement exerted pressure on the Government to appoint a committee to inquire into the allegations made against the Raja of Parikud regarding excessive illegal exaction. The government appointed a Committee in which the Collector of Puri was a member. During his personal inquiry in the Parikud area, the Collector found enough instances of illegal taxes levied by the Raja. However, no action was taken against the Raja because the government was afraid of the fact that any action on the Raja would give a victory signal to the people and thus strengthen the peasant movement.

The Congress organised *Lok Sabhas*, which met in weekly markets in the villages. It emerged as a collective body of the peasants that intended to appeal to the zamindars for redressal of certain

---

79 Ibid.
80 Ibid. On 11 April 1937, Congress leaders i.e. Jagabandhu Sinha, Mohan Das, Prananath Patnaik and Lingaraj Mishra organised a public meeting at Parikud which was attended by 2000 people. In that meeting various grievances of the peasants were discussed and the peasants were advised to be fearless and complain about their grievances in proper courts.
81 Ibid.
grievances. Smt. Sarala Devi, noted congress leader, in a meeting of the Lok Sabha held at Delang on 9 May 1937 passed a resolution saying that the object of the Krishak Sangha and that of the Lok Sabha was the same and hence the Lok Sabha would adopt the minimum demands of the Kisan Sangha.\textsuperscript{82} Though the Lok Sabha was instrumentalised by the Congress, it identified itself with the Kisan Sangha. The Congress consolidated its position and achieved its mass base in rural areas by helping in the formation of the village wing of the peasant organisations such as the Kisan Sangha and the Lok Sabha. The village level organisations held meetings almost daily. The village people took keen interest in these meetings, as the issues taken up for discussion in the meetings were quite appealing to their interest. The Congress and the Kisan Sangha held many peasant conferences and meetings on various occasions during 1936 to 1939 that asserted the peasants' consciousness not only about their own problems but also about the world around them and especially the problems faced by the country.\textsuperscript{83}

The activities of the Kisan Sangha and the Congress did show the crystallisation of the genuine grievances of the peasants that had emerged during the British rule. They exerted pressure on the government to take effective measures to redress the distress faced by

\textsuperscript{82} Government of Orissa, Home Political Dept., Special Section, Fortnightly report from the Collector of Puri, to Chief Secretary, 24.5.1937, (T.F.U. Papers, NAI Acc. 640.)
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
the agrarian community particularly at the time of natural calamities. The Kisan Sangha demanded retransfer of the land to the tenants who had lost land to their zamindars for arrears of rent at the time of agrarian distress. We have a reference to one such demand in Krishnaprasad area of Parikud. There one zamindar purchased land from tenants during the agrarian distress in 1933 - 34. In a peasant conference of the Kisan Sangha held on 23 June 1937 at Sahandi under Krishnaprasad Police Station a resolution was passed demanding retransfer of those lands to the tenants.

A close observation of the activities of the Kisan Sangha and the Congress in Orissa reveals that they initially fought for a common goal i.e. to unite the peasant masses and to involve them in the mainstream of the ongoing anti-colonial political activities. In a meeting of the Kisan Sangha held at village Mukundapur on 13 May 1937 under the presidentship of Nilakantha Das strongly advocated the abolition of the zamindary system as a measure of agrarian reform. Nilakantha Das said "The zamindars have been created by the British Government and they are protected by them. You tenants

---

84 Nilakantha Das, notable Congress leader of the time, had explained the agrarian scene in Orissa in 1927 in his autobiography. He pointed out that - a year of little prosperity that was often followed by recurrence of floods and drought pushed the peasant economy backwards. Nilakantha Das, Atmajivani, (Oriya), Cuttack Students Store, Cuttack, 1963, p. 172.

85 Fortnightly Report from the Collector of Puri, 9 July, 1937 in Ibid.

86 D.O. No. 175/c, 23 June 1937, from DM, Balasore to the Chief Secretary Government of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Section, F.No., 158/ 1937.
are nobody in this country. We have been agitating in the Central Legislative Assembly for the Abolition of the zamindary system. But the Government thinks that the zamindars control all the people of the country."  

Karunakar Panigrahi another Congress leader while moving a resolution for the abolition of the zamindary system pointed out that "If the Government directly deals with the tenants it will know their real difficulties.... If we are to attain Swaraj the zamindary system has to go."  

On this question, Harekrishna Mahatab said, "Even the Government does not want that the Zamindari system should be retained. If all of us join the Congress we can get swaraj. You people should not pay any illegal exaction of the zamindars."  

Yet in another Kisan Sangha meeting, presided by Nilakantha Das at Bhadrak in June 1937, the leaders discussed about the abolition of the zamindari system and there by doing away with the zamindars as a class.  

Another very important peasant conference was held on 15 June 1937 at Banapur Bazar in Puri District. Leaders like H.K.Mahtab (then President elect of the U.P.C.C.), Rajkishna Bose and Lingaraj Mishra were brought to the meeting in a huge procession. About 1500

---

87 Ibid.  
88 Ibid.  
89 The resolution on the abolition of the zamindary system was passed unanimously. See Ibid.  
90 D.O. No. 1548 C, 12 June 1937, Chief Secretary to the D. M. Of Balasore, in Government of Orissa, Home Department, Special Branch, F. No. 158 / 1937.
peasants attended the meeting.\textsuperscript{91} Arakshita Patra, Chairman of the Reception Committee, in his address said that the condition of the peasants in Orissa was very deplorable due to continuous floods and droughts. Having no other means the Oriyas had to go abroad for their earnings.\textsuperscript{92} Those who stuck to cultivation and depended on their lands had to pay everything to maintain the army, and the comforts and the luxuries of the rich. Though the peasants were in a miserable condition, the British Government boasted abroad that the people of India were happy. He described at length how the Indian money was spent in paying fat salaries to the European officials in India and how it had worsened the condition of the masses. He therefore urged the peasants to be united and enrol themselves as members of both the Kisan Sangha and the Congress.\textsuperscript{93}

Rajkrishna Bose while inaugurating the Banpur Peasant Conference said that the main reason for having the peasant movement in India was to upheld and further the objective of the Congress for the attainment of swaraj. He criticised the zamindars, moneylenders, Banks and societies as a sort of interim Government


\textsuperscript{92} Godavarish Mishra recalled that there were grievances of improper employment of native Oriyas as Bengalis, and Telugus dominated courts, educational institutions, hospitals, Railways etc., see Godavarish Mishra, \textit{Ardha Satabdira Odisa O' Tahinre Mo Sthana} (Half Century of Orissa and my place in it ),Granth Mandir, Cuttack, 1958, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
that intended to rule and oppress the peasantry. He repeatedly emphasised that the Congress had launched the peasant movement in order to ameliorate the condition of the peasantry.

He appealed the audience to form peasant associations in every village and maintain unity among them. Arakshita Patra's speech explained the people why the peasant movement was being organised. While attempting to define the peasant movement and the national movement he said that the peasant movement was meant for improving the condition of the peasantry and to redress their grievances, whereas the National Movement led by the Congress aimed at achieving the political freedom of the country for the benefit of all the sections of the society. On the question whether there should be a separate peasant organisation outside the Congress he said that the peasants should have their own organisation and at the same time should not forget the Congress but simultaneously strengthen it by enrolling as Congress members.94

In his presidential address at the Banapur Peasant Conference, H. K. Mahatab defined the peasants as those who paid rents. He pointed out that *swaraj* movement was a movement irrespective of caste or creed, where as, peasant movement was a class movement. All peasants whether Brahmins, Muslims, Khandayats or Karans had same interest. He further added that the peasant organisations were

---

94 Ibid.
meant to enlighten the peasants about their demands. It would never hamper the cause of the Congress. While upholding the separate existence of the peasant movement, Mahtab criticised those Congress leaders who wanted the peasant organisations to merge with the Congress. He emphasised the fact that the Congress had always stood for the Kisans, the poor, and the helpless and had worked for the upliftment of the masses.\textsuperscript{95} Citing the example of the Village Industries Association set up by the Congress at village level, he said that it was started with the idea of helping the artisans and for providing food and employment to the starving millions of India.\textsuperscript{96} In a revolutionary tone Mahtab forecasted a violent revolution if the non-violent struggle led by Gandhi did not yield the desired result, which might lead to a sort of bloodshed that nobody would be able to stop. He further said that the problem of the world was whether men who actually laboured and earned should govern the country or who enjoyed the profits of it.\textsuperscript{97}

Godavarish Mishra, MLA and a notable Congress leader, criticised the action of the Governor of Orissa for appointing the interim ministry.\textsuperscript{98} He addressed the people not to be swept away by the bluffs of the interim ministry by way of bright promises as it was

\textsuperscript{95} For the organisational work of the Congress in rural areas see Sushil Chandra De, \textit{Story of Freedom Struggle in Orissa}, op.cit., pp. 58-59; Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, \textit{Ange Jaha Nivaichhi} (autobiography), Cuttack Students Store, Cuttack, 1973, p. 395.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{New Orissa}, 15.6.1937.


\textsuperscript{98} \textit{New Orissa}, 15.6.1943.
evident that they would not be able to fulfil their promises as Orissa was a deficit province and nothing would be done for the peasants unless the salaries of the high paid officials were curtailed which the interim ministers would not do as they were the underlings of the British officials. The resolutions passed in the Banapur Peasant Conference that raised the minimum agrarian demands of the peasants were as follows:99

(a) Abolition of the post of the Sarbarakars and appointment of clerks in their place to realise rent.
(b) Amendment of forest laws and granting of more privileges to the tenants.
(c) Construction of good roads.
(d) Rights of tenants to use trees and earth from their own lands.
(e) Abolition of taxes levied for fishing in Chilka.
(f) Formation of peasant committees.

Some other resolutions passed in the conference condemned the action of the Governor in appointing the interim ministry and urged for the resignation of the ministry. It also condemned communal agitation, as it was detrimental to the national movement.100

The All India Kisan Day celebration at the Cuttack Municipal ground on 1 September 1937 was a major event in the history of the peasant movement in Orissa.101 It symbolised the culmination of a

100 Ibid.
101 For detail see Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Section, F. NO. 158/1937.
year of bitter struggles and hopes which had given the peasants an
identity and had radicalised them. Malati Choudhury and
Nabakrushna Choudhury the chief organiser of the celebration had
done their best to ensure the participation of a large number of people
and for making the celebration and the show of unity and strength of
the peasants a success. Nearly ten thousand peasants attended the
celebration from all parts of Orissa. They marched in a procession
to the Cuttack Municipal ground holding placards and shouting
slogans electrifying the town and the countryside. The placards
displayed their basic demands i.e. Rent be reduced to the half,
Zamindari system be abolished, down with zamindari system kisan

---

102 Biswamoy Pati, 'Of Moments... op.cit., p. 72.
103 Malati Choudhury, Secretary of the Utkal Kisan Sangha, appealed the people to
attend in large numbers the Kisan day celebration at Cuttack through the leading local
newspaper Samaj. She requested some of her close associate i.e. Gatikrushna Swain of
Gopabandhu Sadhanalaya, Kakatpur, Goura charan Das, Congress, and Kisan Sangha
worker from Balasore, and Manjari Devi W/o Prananath Patnaik, M.L.A. to send
peasants in large numbers, to Cuttack for making the demonstration a success. She
also advised to them to organise big mass meetings on the Kisan Day at Puri, Khurda
and Kakatpur or Gop in view of the fact that representatives from that area might face
difficulties in attending the celebration at Cuttack because of the heavy flood in the
entire Puri Sadar Sub-Division at that time. See U.O. No. 1294, S.B., 18 August 1937,
and Note of the Inspector General of Police to the Chief Secretary, 18 August 1937 in
Home Department, Special Section, F. No. 158/1937 op.cit.
104 Regarding the number of peasants those attended the Kisan Day Celebration On 1
September 1937 at Cuttack the Home Department noted it as 8 to 10 thousand, the
CID Report said it was 10,000, K. M. Patra mentions it as 12,000 and Biswamoy Pati
puts the figure as 20,000. See Govt. of Orissa Home Dept. Special Section, F. No. 158/
1937; Extract from Orissa Police Abstract of Intelligence, No 33, 3 September 1937 in
Ibid.; K. M. Patra, Orissa Legislature...op. cit., pp. 117-118; B. Pati, 'Of Movements...op.
cit. p. 72. However, during the Kisan Day celebration in 1938 at Cuttack large number
of people from the neighbouring Orissa States participated. According to an official
estimate the celebration was attended by about 15,000 to 20,000 people. See
Government of India, Home Political, F. No., 18-9-1938, fortnightly report for the first
half of September 1938.
and labourers unite, water tax be reduced to half, mutation fee be abolished, *matxa dhana kotha heu* (Math properties be confiscated) forest tax be abolished etc. Holding the national flag and the red flags (with hammer & sickle) they shouted slogans such as down with imperialism, abolish landlordism, etc.\(^{105}\)

The central aim of the peasant gathering on the Kisan day was to felicitate and interview the Congress ministers and put pressure on them to bring legislations for redressal of the grievances of the peasants and for immediate reduction of rent. Prominent leaders present in the meeting were Gouranga Charan Das, Chairman, Malati Choudhury, Secretary of the Utkal Kisan Sangha, Nabakrushna Choudhury, H.K. Mahtab, Mohan Das, Pranakrushna Padhiary, Baidyanath Rath and others. Gouranga Charan Das read out an address that consisted of a concise list of the demands of the peasants as decided in the Banpur Peasant Conference. The immediate demand put forth in the meeting was for remission of rent of two annas per rupee in flood-affected areas and supervision of rent by eight annas per rupee for peasants who had lost their crops. Biswanath Das, the Chief Minister, during his interview by the peasant leaders asked the peasants to wait patiently for reduction of rent and assured them that

---

\(^{105}\) Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Section, Fortnightly Confidential Report from Collector of Cuttack to Chief Secretary, 10 September, 1937 (TFU Papers, NAI, Acc. 640.)
his cabinet would do whatever was in their power and advised people to be peaceful and quiet. Reacting sharply on the reply of Biswanath Das Malati Choudhury asked how the peasants could be peaceful with empty stomachs. She urged the people not to be afraid of the police and advised the townsmen to be careful lest the hungry peasants would assemble in large numbers and loot the towns if their legitimate grievances were not redressed. This statement of Malati Choudhury was to be seen as an attempt to win over the support townsmen to the peasants cause.

Baidyanath Rath demanded remission of half of the rent for the year 1937 and requested the Ministers to issue orders for realisation of the other half in the next year. Nityananda Kanungo, Revenue Minister, in his reply stated that action was being initiated and that some of the grievances of the peasants would be discussed immediately in the Legislative Assembly. Mohan Das said that the peasants were yet to devise means for fighting against British imperialism. They should never dream of any relief from the ministers because the new constitution had practically given them no power. They should demand that all their grievances should be redressed.

---

106 Samaj, 2 September 1937; Extract from Orissa Police Abstract of Intelligence, No. 33, 3 September 1937.
107 Government of Orissa, Home Department, Special Section, Fortnightly Report from Collector of Balasore, to Chief Secretary, 10 September 1937, (T.F.U. Papers, NAI, Acc. 640).
falling which they should be ready for a countrywide revolution that would put an end to British imperialism and capitalism. He advised the peasants not to pay *Sunia bheti*, to their Zamindars.\(^{109}\) H.K. Mahatab in his speech explained the audience about the futility of the new constitution and office acceptance by Ministers. He also explained the audience about the meaning of *Swaraj*.\(^{110}\) Besides endorsing the resolutions taken in the Banpur Peasant Conference, the Kisan day meeting took two important resolutions i.e. (a) Every Peasant should be a member of the Kisan Sangha as well as the Congress so as to make the Congress stronger to fight against the reactionary powers, and to approach the ministers to appoint a committee to enquire into the oppressions meted out to the peasants by Zamindars and to publish their report in newspapers for the information of the general public.\(^{111}\) However, the Congress ministry failed to set up any such inquiry committee perhaps because of the internal pressure from leaders within the Congress who became sympathetic to the landlords.

The Kisan Day celebration on 1 September 1937 and several hundreds of peasant meetings that were held on the same day in different parts of Orissa were part of a broad campaign.\(^{112}\) The

\(^{109}\) Ibid.

\(^{110}\) Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Government of Orissa, Home Department, Special Section, Fortnightly Report From Collector of Cuttack to the Chief Secretary, 10 December 1937, TFU Papers, Acc, 640.

\(^{112}\) *Congress Socialist*, 17 September 1937.
evidences regarding refusal of peasants to pay illegal exaction's to their landlords during this period speaks about the success of the peasant meetings and rallies, which generated a lot of courage and revolutionised the spirit of the peasantry. Several other peasant meetings in towns and in rural areas were organised to voice resentment against the zamindars who opposed agrarian reforms and concessions introduced by the Congress Ministry such as the Tenancy Amendment Acts.\textsuperscript{113} Resolutions were passed for the abolition of the Zamindari System and mutation fee etc. They also demanded for appointment of experts to teach people better method of cultivation.\textsuperscript{114} Other agrarian issues that were repeatedly discussed were construction of strong embankments, reduction of water rates, better irrigation facilities, non payment of illegal taxes and abolition of bethi, etc.\textsuperscript{115} In October 1937, peasants of Cuttack demanded postponement of the Collection of land revenue. Malati Choudhury met the Collector of Cuttack and urged him to postpone the Kartik kist (instalment of land revenue paid in the month of October & November).\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{113} Government of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Section, Fortnightly Report from Collector of Cuttack , 10 December, 1937,(TFU Papers, Acc. 640).

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 24 December 1937.

\textsuperscript{115} In a peasant meeting in Salepur and Kendrapara during September 1937, leaders like Pranakrishna Padhiary, Brajanath Mishra, Sachidananda Mohanty, Adwait Ballav Ray and Saraswati Devi urged for the people to oppose the zamindari system. See Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Section, Fortnightly Confidential Report from Collector of Cuttack to Chief Secretary, 25 September 1937 (TFU papers ACC 640).

\textsuperscript{116} Fortnightly Report from Collector of Cuttack, 10 October 1937, in (TFU Papers NAI, Acc. 640).
The Utkal Kisan Sangha repeatedly upheld the right of the peasants and tribal over the trees.\textsuperscript{117} Phanindranath Pal, who was very closely associated with the peasant movement, advised the peasants to cut away jungle bushes without permission of the Estate owners. The cutting down of trees in Sukinda Estate suggests the impact of the peasant movement on the peasants and tribal. For instance the Tahasildar and the Forest Guard of Sukinda Estate Reported that 12 \textit{Harijans} (members of a Scheduled caste people) of Sukinda Estate cut down about 50 \textit{Sal} trees in the first week of December 1937.\textsuperscript{118} Similarly in January 1938, 30 tribal tenants of Village Gourapal in Sukinda Estate cut down 19 trees without permission.\textsuperscript{119}

The tree-cutting episode in Sukinda Estate depicts the assertive role played by the peasants & tribal on the wake of the peasant movement. The Kisan Sangha extended its support to the \textit{Kols} of Sukinda who had cut down trees violating the existing law. In a huge peasant meeting on 3 February 1938 at Pachhikote \textit{hat} under Korai Police Station Malati Choudhury said that the cutting of trees by the Kols was just and right, and the Kisan Sangha would fight on the issue in support of the \textit{Kols}.\textsuperscript{120} The Kisan Sangha also advised the

\textsuperscript{117} Confidential letter No. 166 / C, 9 February 1938, from SP Cuttack to SP C.I.D. Orissa, In Government of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Section, F.No.48 / 1938.
\textsuperscript{118} Extract from the Confidential Diary of SP Cuttack, 14.1.1938 in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Extract from the Confidential Diary of Cuttack, 22.1.1938, in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Confidential letter No.166/C, 9.2.1938, from SP Cuttack to SP C.I.D.(Orissa),in Ibid.
peasants and the villagers not to pay fines to the Estate Owners for arrears of rent. 121

The Congress and the Peasant Movement:

Because of the formation of the Congress ministries, there had been a remarkable mass awakening in the country. The leaders expressed their view that the Congress had assumed the reins of administration to show the British Government as to how they could better organise the country even in their limited power. 122 The leaders used various public platforms to express this viewpoint. 123 Loknath Mishra exhorted the people to accept their leaders as preceptors and asked them to organise and be prepared to carry out the instruction of Gandhi. 124

Strong resentment was voiced against the action of the Governor of Orissa in sending the Madras Estate Land Amendment Bill. In the fifth session of the Utkal Provincial Political Conference held at

---

121 Extract from the Confidential diary of S.P.Cuttack, 22.1.1938, in Ibid.
122 Speech of Loknath Mishra at a Congress meeting held on 14 November 1939, Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Branch, ACC No.1176 Con. Political speeches like explaining the situation leading to the office acceptance by Congress was attended by good number of people. Enrolment of more members in the Congress was emphasized and taken up in such meetings. See Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Section, Collector of Balasore to the Chief Secretary, 24 August 1937 (ACC 630 confidential).
123 For instance in a condolence meeting organized in Balasore on 27 August 1937 on the death of a local Doctor Nanda Kishore Das and Harekrishna Mahat used the occasion and explained to the public circumstances under which Congress accepted office. See Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Branch, Fortnightly Confidential Report from Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary, 9 September 1937 (ACC 630 Confidential OSA).
124 Speech of Loknath Mishra, in a Congress meeting held at Lion’s Gate, Puri Town on 14 November 1939 in ibid.
Cuttack from 21 to 22 May 1938 Nandakishor Das, Speaker of the Orissa Assembly moved a resolution in which he said that this act of the Governor was contrary to the assurance given by the Government of India that they will not interfere with the constructive work done by the Congress ministry. The conference urged the Governor General to pass this Bill into Act as soon as possible and thereby allow the peasants to enjoy the concessions enjoined in it. The conference also urged that the Governor of Orissa should not commit the same mistake as he has done in the case of Madras Estate Land Amendment Bill by not giving his assent to the Orissa Tenancy Amendment Bill.125

Nanda Kishore Das further stated that the people had confidence on the Congress candidates. If the decision of the Congress members were not accepted then the result would not be palatable for the British Government. They would create such a situation, which Gandhi had all along been trying to avoid. He asked the people that they should certainly be prepared for such consequences but at the same time he clarified that Gandhi and the Congress party were not in favour of the revival of the Civil Disobedience Movement again.126

The leaders showed their unanimity in urging for the passage of the Orissa Tenancy Bill, 1937. Smt. Malati Devi who seconded the

125 Report on the Fifth Session of the Utkal Political Conference held at Cuttack on 21-22 May 1938, in Govt. of Orissa, Criminal Investigation Dept., Special Branch, Memo No.1176-80 S-B, 25 May 1938, Superintendent of Police, CID, Orissa to Chief Secretary (TF Unit Papers NAI, ACC No.655).
126 Ibid.
Resolution went on saying that the Congress ministers would resign if the Governor vetoed the Bill and the country would plunge into another no-tax campaign.\textsuperscript{127} In such a political atmosphere Biswanath Das, the Premier of Orissa who was present in the conference urged the audience to take an optimistic view of the Government decision. He expressed his grief over the action of the Governor of Orissa for not giving his assent to the Madras Estate Amendment Bill and not consulting his cabinet before sending it to the Governor General. However, he was not so pessimistic like Malati Devi and Nanda Kishore Das. He still expressed his hope for a better understanding and assured the audience that the Orissa cabinet was taking strong action over the matter. He stated that this action of the Governor of Orissa had given an opportunity to the Socialist Party to prove that the assurance given by the British Government were all fake and that it was not worthwhile to accept office.\textsuperscript{128}

When the Congress Ministry resigned the Governor of Orissa instead of forming another ministry took the charge of administration himself. This was criticised by Congress leaders who said that this was not the principle of democracy. Rather, they termed it, as the advent of anarchy. They took this opportunity to ask people to hope for Swaraj.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
Jagannath Mishra, MLA said, "the progress of (Swaraj) which neither the bombs nor Air Force could check."\(^{129}\)

The leaders appreciated democracy through non-violence.\(^{130}\) Biswanath Das, the ex-Premier exhorted the people to promote unity and determination in order to build a united front to support the Congress. He, however, warned the people against any ill treatment of the Government servants.\(^{131}\) Aftermath of the formation of the Congress ministry, the nationalist leaders tried to mobilise people for attainment of political independence within a short period of time. The leaders urged the people not to be satisfied with the formation of the separate province of Orissa as they said it was done haphazardly.\(^{132}\) They cited examples of the 1930 Civil Obedience Movement, Gandhi Irwin Pact, Salt Campaign, Gandhi Orissa tour etc. for drawing inspiration from the past. Referring to the office acceptance by the Congress they said, "though the acceptance of office had given an opportunity to make the Congress stronger by awakening consciousness among the masses yet it has not been able to put an end

---

129 Speech of Jagannath Mishra in ibid.

130 Speech of Nilakantha Das, in Puri District Political Conference, held at Gop, on 21 May 1939, in Orissa Police Abstract of Intelligence, vol. IV, No. 20, 6 June 1939, in Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept. Special Branch [ACC No.1176 confidential].

131 Speech of Biswanath Das, at Puri town on 14 November 1939, see Confidential Memo No.5309/S.B., 16 November 1939 from Superintendent of Police, CID, Orissa to Chief Secretary (in ACC No.1176 Con).

132 Speech of Bhagirathi Mohapatra, Chairman of the Reception Committee in the Fifth Session of the Utkal Provincial Political Conference, held on 21 and 22 May 1938, held at Cuttack, see Govt. of Orissa, Criminal Investigation Dept. Special Branch, Memo No.1176-80S.B., 25 May 1938, Superintendent of Police, CID, Orissa to Secretary to the Governor of Orissa (in T.F. Paper, NAI ACC No.655).
to the policy of the British imperialism. There has been no change in the policy of exploitation by the brutal force."¹³³

Did the Congress Ministry fulfil the aspiration of the peasants? Did it bring any change in the socio-economic condition of the peasants? In fact, the agrarian legislations like the Orissa Tenancy Amendment Act, Orissa moneylenders Act brought very nominal relief to the peasants, which failed to make any radical impact in rural areas in terms of ameliorating poverty.¹³⁴

The criticism of the Congress ministry for their failure to achieve the cause of the masses or to give relief to the peasantry was emphasised by leaders to arouse class-consciousness among the masses particularly the peasants. They tried to prove the point that the Congress Government was being manned by capitalists and rich people who did not try to annoy the Government for securing the rights and privileges of the peasants. They urged that if the masses join their hands in the anti-imperial struggle it is they who were going to be benefited in free India. The leaders impressed upon the peasantry that they would lead a dignified life free from exploitation and oppression and could have power when India attains

¹³³ Ibid.
¹³⁴ Vinita Damodaran, Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935-46, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 374-375; She observes that "To make a real dent in rural poverty the Congress would have needed to launch a forthright attack on the inequalities of rural land holding distribution and to effectively implement minimum wage legislation for the millions of often semi-bonded agricultural labourers."
independence. Thus, the peasantry was mobilised to join for a greater national cause.\textsuperscript{135}

While delivering a speech on “social and present political situation” S.S. Batliwala drew the attention of the people towards their own miserable condition and poverty. He said, “Most of the poor people (in Orissa) appeared to be victims of various kinds of diseases. Females have no proper cloths to cover themselves. The circumstances, which the people were facing, had made them unable to meet with their legitimate requirements. Puri looked like a permanent seat of ‘poverty’. From a close and careful study of the situation one could easily draw a conclusion that the above were due to the exploitation of the capitalists.”\textsuperscript{136}

Batliwala urged for a change in the policy of the Congress. He said that the capitalists, i.e. the Rajas, zamindars and Mohants had forgotten their real duty towards their subjects. He asked, “how long the Kisans and labourers could remain under the tyranny of these capitalists.” He alleged that the capitalists did not like to see the prosperous condition of their subjects, nor did they like to look to the comforts of their subjects.\textsuperscript{137} Her further said, “these capitalists were

\textsuperscript{135} See Speech S.S. Batliwala, leader of Congress Socialist Party, at Cuttack Town Hall on 4 June 1938 on the subject present “Political Situation in India”, in Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Section, F.No.149-B, 1938 (ACC 655 TF Unit Papers, NAI).
\textsuperscript{136} Speech of S.S. Batliwala, Socialist leader, at Lion’s Gate, Puri Town on 7 June 1938 in Govt. of Orissa, Home Dept., Special Section, 1938 (ACC No.655 TF Unit Papers, NAI).
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
no better than cheats. The poor kisans had since been tolerating it and pocketing all sorts of their misbehaviour, but now they would not."\textsuperscript{138}

While sympathising the poor economic condition of the peasantry Batliwala said, "All kinds of grains were cultivated by the Kisans, but the benefit of the same were being utilised by the foreigners and therefore there had been no signs of improvement in their condition... The Britishers, who were so far exploiting this country will ruin us."\textsuperscript{139} While expressing his socialist ideas Batliwala further commented that the Rajas, zamindars, and other capitalist members were the underlings of the Britishers. The people's condition was therefore no better than slaves. He highlighted the deprivation of the deserving but poor children of the peasants from good education as well as government job. He said that if proper facilities were given to them they might prove as better servants of the country in the long run. Therefore, he urged the people to join in the fight against colonialism.\textsuperscript{140}

Once the leaders succeeded in the mass awareness programme they discussed how to make use this mass consciousness in achieving

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid. In this context Batliwala said, "There should be a mass agitation now. These 'Gora Bunders' (white monkeys) should go away from this country. They were no longer required now."
their goal. Gopabandhu Chaudhury, a prominent Congress leader, expressed his opinion that the masses to be taught three things, i.e. non-violence, fearlessness and self-reliance. He expressed his strong belief that all the difficulties of the masses would vanish when they cultivate these three qualities. Moreover, he believed that the spirit of non-violence would make a man morally strong and change the mentality of his aggressor.

**Resentment against the salt policy:**

Salt manufacture was a side business of the Oriya people. After the December rice harvest agriculturists engaged themselves in manufacturing salt until the rainy season. Before the arrival of the British two lakhs Oriyas were engaged in the salt business. The ban on salt manufacturing by the British Government made many

---

141 Report on the Fifth Session of the Utkal Provincial Political Conference held on 21 and 22 May 1938, at Cuttack, in Govt. of Orissa, Home Deptt. Special Section, Memo No.1176-SO, S.B., 25 May 1938, Superintendent of Police, CID to Secretary to the Governor of Orissa (in ACC No.655 TFU papers).

142 Ibid.

143 The manufacture of salt was a flourishing industry along the eastern coast of Orissa. As a common day today necessity of all people, trade in the article fetched good profits.' See K. M. Patra, "British Salt Monopoly in Orissa" in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya ed., Essays in Modern Indian Economic History, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1987, p. 93.

unemployed and poorer.  

During the civil disobedience movement announced his decision to defy the salt laws. His famous Dandi March in Gujrat to break the salt law gave a signal for a country salt satyagraha. Different sections of the Oriya people including the women, youth, students and the elite welcomed the salt campaign and actively participated in the salt satyagraha in coastal Orissa. The salt campaign, however, cold not continue for long. It came to a closer with the signing of the Gandhi- Irwin Pact in 1931. The said pact provided a partial concession to the people of poorer classes living in the saliferous tracts who were allowed to collect or make their own salt for domestic consumption and sale it in limited quanties in their villages. Though the salt campaign could not succeed in the restoration of the indigenous salt industry and repeal of the salt tax yet it strengthened the anti-colonial movement. 

---

145 In this context, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya points out that "The salt duty which was virtually a poll tax on the lowest income group was an expanding source of revenue." See S. Bhattacharya, Financial Foundation of the British Raj: Men and Idea in the post Mutiny Period of Reconstruction of Indian Public Finance, 1858-1872, Indian Institute of Advance Study, Shimla, 1971 p. 12. He further states that " the duty on salt was one of those indirect taxes which fell mainly on the poor. The official spokesman of the Indian Government often claimed that it was the only tax - excepting land revenue - which the mass of the people paid to the Government. On this ground the duty was gradually screwed up..." (p. 197). Also see Surya Narayan Das, Unabinsa Satabdira Odisa, Vol. I. op.cit., pp. 75-76.


147 Sadananda Choudhury, Economic History of Colonialism, A Study of British Salt policy in Orissa, Inter India Publications, Delhi, 1979, pp. 218-219.
In the post civil disobedience phase the leaders took up the issue of salt manufacture. In this connection, they said that colonial rulers had forcibly suppressed the only subsidiary industry that maintained Orissa in the past.\textsuperscript{148} The Utkal Provincial Political Conference strongly urged that the people should be allowed to manufacture salt free of duty.\textsuperscript{149} While moving a resolution in this regard, Harekrishna Mahtab narrated how free manufacture of salt was forcibly stopped by the Government at the point of bayonets, which led to protest in Cuttack. He then explained that the salt business would be able to solve the unemployment problem of the Oriyas and the poor people would be able to earn their livelihood. He cited examples of settlement officers and historians who had agreed upon the economic benefit of the salt business to the natives and how its stoppage had brought a great financial loss to the poor people who depended on the manufacture and sale of salt. He then explained that the provincial Government had no hands in it and urged people to agitate in a constitutional way to get this concession back from the Government of India.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148} Though salt was declared as contraband, its secret manufacture continued especially during the Civil Disobedience Movement. It was reported that Contraband salt was seized in Balasore District (in May 1932) enroute to adjoining Mayurbhanj State. See D.O. letter no.85 cc, Chief Secretary, Bihar and Orissa to Govt. of India, Home Department, Political Branch, F. N. 7/1932.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
The surging wave of the non-co-operation and the civil disobedience movements launched by the Indian National Congress caught the people of the Orissa states in an unprecedented nationalist fervour in the 1930's. The message of Gandhi spread like wild fire throughout the country penetrating into the citadels of Orissa Feudatory States. The growing popular struggle in the British administered districts could not go unheeded for long and the simmering discontentment of the states people in Orissa caused by then prevailing practice of feudal levies soon prompted them to discard their sense of fear. The humiliating customs and exaction in the states i.e. bethi, begari, magan and rasad were no longer thought to be tolerated. The situation in the Garjat States of Orissa was that of oppression and prohibition by the ruling chiefs. Any form of agitation was forbidden, reading of newspapers, public meetings, and appeals attracted royal anger and royal punishment. The chiefs inflicted strict rules on peoples associations and demonstrations. The judicial system was not effective in the states. Though the British Government took actions against agitation in British territories, the action taken by the feudalatory chiefs were ten times higher and inhuman and brutal in the states. If the people of British Orissa were under the control of one ruler

i.e., the British Government, the people in the states were subject to the mercy of both the Rajas and the British. Therefore, it was very difficult to make any revolutionary protest movements against the feudal administration in the princely states. 152 The British Government allowed the Indian States to pursue their dynastic objectives almost unfettered by the imperial connection. Their indirect rule in the states 'failed to provide an infrastructure for modernisation and thus left the States in poor shape.' 153

Prajamandal movement in the feudatory states of Orissa, starting with the Nilgiri State, began with much vigour. The leaders presented their charter of demands to the ruling chiefs and formation of democratic government through elected representatives of the people in the states. To fan up the movement different political parties such as the Congress and the Socialist leaders realised that the federation of India had strengthened the position of the Feudatory Chiefs, who were thus emboldened to persist with their repressive policy.154 In the first phase of the movement the feudatory states of Nilgiri, Talcher, Dhenkanal, Nayagarh, Khandpara, Ranpur, and Athagarh took

---

152 Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, op.cit., p. 54.
153 It is argued that the British policy towards Indian States 'suffered from a lack of coherence and was ineffectual', see Ian Copland, *The British Raj and the Indian Princes in Western India 1857-1930*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1982, p. 310,: also see Lloyd and Susane Rudolph, 'Rajputna under Paramountcy: The failure of Indirect Rule', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 38, 1966, pp. 138-160.
prominent role. Besides other States which were involved in a comparatively less degree, were Hindol, Athmallick, Bamra, Sonepur and Boudh. Nevertheless the spirit of the movement was felt all over the states of Orissa. The political agent in the Chhatisgarh States Agency, in a letter to the Raja of Kalahandi had thus observed in January 1939-
"From the trend of events in the past few months you will have realised that the agitation in any state is not unlikely".\textsuperscript{155} Nilagiri showed the way. This was the first State in Orissa where the state peoples movement took a serious form.\textsuperscript{156}

The peasant Movement in British Orissa showed solidarity with the peasants in the Feudatory States of Orissa.\textsuperscript{157} The demands of the Kisan Sangha like grazing rights, rights over trees, abolition of illegal exaction's and Zamindary system, reduction of excessive rent, revision

\textsuperscript{155} Kalahandi Papers, (Orissa State Archives), Political Agent, Chhatisgarh State Agency, Raipur to the Raja of Kalahandi, 27 January 1939.
\textsuperscript{156} Government Of Orissa, Orissa States Enquiry Committee Report, Cuttack, 1939, p.99.
of Forest Laws, and abolition of *Bethi*\(^{158}\) (forced labour) etc. were also extended to the Feudatory States. While condemning atrocities against peasants in the States i.e. Dhenkanal, Nilgiri, & Athagarh the Congress as well as the peasant leaders joined hands with the leaders of the States. They organised joint meetings in the coastal districts as well as in the States and discussed about the common problem faced by the peasantry in both the places. We find reference to a joint agitation in Nayagarh State for grazing rights in October 1938. In the same month a meeting was held at Dharmasala in Cuttack District where Nabakrushna Choudhury, Phanindranath Pal and Sarangadhar Das (Secretary Orissa States Peoples Conference, and a prominent leader of the Prajamandal Movement in Dhenkanal State) addressed an audience of 4000 persons.\(^{159}\) Demands of the States people were discussed in


the meeting. Referring to the agitation in the Nilagiri State, Sarangadhar Das said "the people of the other states are behind the Nilagiri Movement and will when the time comes, extend every kind of active sympathy and co-operation. Nilagiri is destined to be the torch bearer for the suffering millions of the Orissa States." On 25 October 1938 in a meeting held at Chandanpur in Puri District, the atrocities of the Rulers of Dhenkanal and other States were condemned. In another meeting held on 29 October 1938 at Nimapara in Puri District, attitude of the Government towards States peoples' agitation was condemned. A hartal was observed at Khurdha showing solidarity with the people of the Feudatory States.

The Congress was criticised for its role in the Orissa States. The newspapers like Desakatha, Lokmata and New Orissa published a series of articles criticising the Congress for its intervention in the affairs of the states. However it may be argued that the State peoples movement in Orissa though patronised by the Congress from British Orissa yet there was an active local leadership in the states itself who had emerged as leaders by their own capacity. In their struggle against the misrule of the Princes they had found their counterparts among

---

162 U.O. No. 2416, 1.10. 1938, from I.G. police to Chief Secretary, in Ibid.,
politicians and freedom fighters in British Orissa as helpful and encouraging. Therefore it is not fair to argue that the interference of the Congress in the States was only to expand its political interest.\textsuperscript{163}

**Forms of Peasant Protest.**

The peasants came up to protest against the colonial system in an organised way through the Kisan Sangha and the Congress. The leaders who championed the cause of the peasantry as well as the Congress tried to shape the mind of the peasantry so that their political consciousness could be used for the anti-colonial movement. The line of action was undoubtedly based on the principles of non-violence that was advocated by Gandhi. The Non-cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Salt *Satyagraha* as well as the visit of Gandhi had succeeded in penetrating into the minds of masses the concept of non-violence and a wider acceptability of

\textsuperscript{163} In this context it is apt to quote Robert W. Stern who says " Politicians in Princely India used Nationalist Resources as they used imperialist and indigenous resources, differently, selectively, and primarily for local purposes." See Robert W. Stern, " An Approach to politics in the Princely States," in Robin Jeffery, ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1978, p.367. Similarly D. A. Low also agrees that " Prajamandals had sprang up or been activated in a number of princely states in the late 1930s as new professional men there suddenly realised how far advanced politically their like in British India had become, whilst they themselves still stood subject to the autocratic rule of the Dewans and Maharajas". D.A.Low, " Laissez-faire and Traditional Ruler-ship in Princely India", in Robin Jeffery ed., op.cit, p.383. Moreover, as Ian Copland points out, there are striking parallels between the *satyagraha* movement in the States in 1938-39 and the agitational campaigns of 1922, 1930, and 1942 in British India. The States Peoples Movements "aroused out of parochial grievances; was captured and transformed by Congress into a struggle against British Imperialism..." See Ian Copland, "Congress Paternalism : The 'High Command ' And the Struggle For Freedom in Princely India", op.cit., p. 134.
Gandhi's economic and political ideas. This resulted in making things easier for the local leadership. The local leaders, however, played a very significant role in mobilising the peasantry to launch united protest against the landlords, zamindars and the colonial authorities.

The peasants mustered courage to protest against non-issue of rent receipts. For instance, on 9 May 1937, as a result of the inspiration derived from the peasant meetings held earlier, about 50 tenants from the zamindary of Samanta Radha Prasanna Das, of Balasore met the Collector of Balasore and appealed against the non-issue of rent receipts by their zamindar. The Collector advised them that if they were not given rent receipts they could deposit the money in the court or file an application against the zamindar for non-issue of the receipt.164

The tenants also refused to pay rent to their zamindars. This resulted in numerous rent suits filed by the zamindars against the defaulting tenants. The rent suits were so much that in November 1937 a pleader of Bhadrak suggested the Government to appoint an additional Rent Suit Deputy Collector at Bhadrak as the staffs were inadequate to deal with so many cases.165 In June 1941 about 30,000 rent suits were filed in Cuttack. There was a difference of opinion

164 Govt. of Orissa, *Home Department, Special Section*, F.No.KW7/1937, Fortnightly Confidential Report from the Collector of Balasore to the Chief Secretary, 9 May 1937.
between the Collector of Cuttack and the zamindars regarding the reason of such huge rent receipts. The Collector considered that the default in payment of rent was mainly due to the tenants incapacity to pay whereas the zamindars said that it was due to the unwillingness of the tenants to pay as a result of the protection provided by the Congress Ministry as well as the peasant movement. The Chief Secretary, however, felt the zamindars view more convincing.\textsuperscript{166} He believed that since the prices of crops were high and there was no crop failure there could not be any other reason but the unwillingness of the tenantry to pay the rents. Nevertheless, the Chief Secretary's belief and the zamindar view spoke much of the impact of the peasant movement and the background role played by the nationalist leadership.

Similarly, the Deputy Commissioner of Sambalpur reported (in July 1941) that for the first time, the zamindar of Borasambar in Sambalpur defaulted in land revenue. A sum of Rs.6,000/- remained unpaid on the 30 June 1941 out of a sum of Rs.12,000. The reason for the default was that the tenants did not pay and thus the zamindar failed to realise even half of the rent due from his tenants.\textsuperscript{167} There were references of non-payment of \textit{Suniaveti} [presents to the zamindar

\textsuperscript{166}Govt. of India, Home Dept., Political Branch, F.No.18/7/1941 Fortnightly Confidential Report for the first half of 1941, from Chief Secretary, Orissa to the Secretary, Home Dept., GOI.

\textsuperscript{167}Ibid.
on the first day of the Amil (agricultural) years.\textsuperscript{168} However, in spite of the advises repeated at many meetings in rural areas against the practice of offering \textit{Suniaveti} the usual offerings of fruits, milk, curd etc. continued in almost all estates, except, in Sukinda Estate where the practice was marginal because of the inhabitants in the estate were large number of aboriginal immigrants for whom the \textit{Sunia} festival was not a long established custom.\textsuperscript{169}

The no rent campaign had led to a declining trend in the collection of land revenue. As the Collector of Cuttack reported the November 1937 \textit{kist} of land revenue, the realisation was 58 percent of the total demand and about 43 percent of the current demand. The actual amount of arrears was about 5 lakhs, the annual demand being 15 lakhs excluding Anugul. At the time of the November 1936 \textit{kist} the percentage realised out of the total demand was 68 percent and for the same \textit{kist} in 1934 and 1935 it was 67 percent. In April 1937 \textit{kist} it was 66 percent, in 1935 it was 62 percent. The collections in both \textit{kists} of 1936 were an improvement on previous ones because two large estates paid their arrears in full. However, he admitted that the 1936


\textsuperscript{169} Govt. of Orissa, \textit{Home Dept. Special Section}, Collector of Cuttack to Chief Secretary, 10 September 1937 (TF Unit papers ACC No.640). The Collector of Balasore also made by Congressmen to stop \textit{Suniaveti} to the landlord of Dolsahi and other zamindars of Bhadrak Sub-Division but it was of little success. See Govt. of Orissa, \textit{Home Dept., Special Section}, F.No.KW7/1937, D.O.No.286/C, 25 September 1937, Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary.
collections were lower than they should have been, even allowing the steady decline since the economic depression.\textsuperscript{170}

On 11 April 1937 Congress leaders among whom Jagabandhu Sinha, MLA, Mohan Das, MLA, Pranath Patnaik, MLA and Lingaraj Mishra held a meeting at Krishnaprasad (Parikud) which did 2000 people attend. In that meeting, the various grievances of the villagers were aired. The villagers were asked not to submit tamely to the illegal exaction of the Raja of Parikud, but to complain about their grievances in the proper courts. A committee was appointed to inquire into the allegations against the Raja of Parikud. The Collector of Puri visited Krishna Prasad on 13 April 1937 for making inquiries about the allegations.\textsuperscript{171} He found the Raja guilty of charging illegal taxes but did not take any action because he thought that helping the peasants cause would have meant strengthening the peasant movement.\textsuperscript{172}

The Lok Sabhas that met in weekly markets in the villages emerged as a constitutional body of the peasants. It appealed to the zamindars for redressal of certain grievances.\textsuperscript{173} Smt. Sarala Devi, in a meeting on 9 May 1937 at Delang, passed a resolution saying that the object of the Krishak Sangha and that of the Lok Sabha was the

\textsuperscript{170}Fortnightly Confidential Report from Collector of Cuttack to Chief Secretary, 10 December 1937 (T.F.Unit Papers, NAI, Accession no. 640).
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Fortnightly Report from the Collector of Puri to Chief Secretary, 24 May 1937 (T.F.Unit Papers, NAI, Accession no. 640)
same and hence the Lok Sabha should adopt the minimum demands of the Krishak Sangha.\textsuperscript{174}

The Congress made most energetic use of the Krishak Sangha in order to consolidate their position in the rural areas. The Krishak Sangha units were formed in every village and meetings were held almost daily. The village people took keen interest in these meetings as a direct appeal was made to their self-interest.\textsuperscript{175} The Congress activities were mainly directed to further the peasant movement. Many peasant conferences and meetings were held in several areas in all the three districts. The participation of peasants in these meetings and conferences was quite very significant.\textsuperscript{176}

There was a wrangle between the right Congress leaders headed by Pandit Nilakantha Das and the socialist group headed by Malati Devi of Cuttack on the question whether the Krishak Sangha should have a separate existence or work within the Congress organisation. The socialist group favoured the separate existence of the peasant movement whereas the group of Pandit Nilakantha Das, which contained some landholders, was apprehensive that if not kept under their watchful supervision the peasant movement would go out of control to the detriment of all the property owning class.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Fortnightly Report from the Collector of Puri to Chief Secretary, 9 June 1937 (T.F.Unit Papers, NAI, Accession no. 640)
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
The Puri District Political Conference, held in May 1937 under the chairmanship of Pandit Nilakantha Das, brought one controversial Resolution that raised a heated dispute. The socialist leaders like Malati Devi, Mohan Das and Pandit Godavarish Mishra opposed the resolution. They asked the President to allow Rajkrishna Bose who was the President of the Utkal Provincial Krishak Sangha to address the meeting. The President did not allow this. This led to a heated exchange of words between the President and Srimati Malati Devi and the latter left the meeting with her followers. After this the President declared the resolution carried. The said resolution declared the Congress policies and programs on the nature of the peasant movement that the Congress intended to patronise. The resolution conveyed that

"This conference of the public of Puri district declares their strong opinion that after the last civil disobedience movement it was kept a separate public organisation to keep the mass in direct touch with the Congress and as the majority of the Indian mass consisted of peasants this separate organisation was named as Krishak Sangha in which the Congress workers started their agitation to better the condition of the mass and to raise their political status. Now as dissension and disputes are being noticed amongst the Congress workers regarding the aims and

\[178\] Collector of Puri to Chief Secretary, 9 June 1937 in Ibid.
objects of the Krishak Sangha, this District conference declares its opinion regarding the Krishak Sangha as set forth below and calls upon the Congress workers and the public of Puri district to follow and work them out."

(a) A "Krushak" is not only the one who cultivates the land, not the one who depends on agriculture for one’s livelihood. All the poor tenants of India are really the “Krushaks.” Neither those nominal zamindars who are suffering from various financial and political disabilities do belong to any “interested protected class” nor those tenants who possesses thousands acres of ‘Raiti’ lands and thereby enjoy all the happiness and advantages of the “interested” class are "Krushaks." Likewise, the poor labourers are also termed as Krusaks.

(b) The present constitution is the root cause of the miseries of the “Krishaks.” As the Congress is fighting to change this constitution and establish “Swaraj,” the Krishak agitation must be subordinated to the Congress. Therefore, the peasants should form their “sanghas” inside the Congress and name as Congress Krishak Sangha and thereby capture the Congress.

(c) The economic and political emancipation of the peasants is only possible through the Congress. Hence the Congress workers should not join or be in touch with those Krishak Sanghas which are neither affiliated to the Congress nor ready to come under the Congress.
The Puri District Conference laid down that Congress workers should obtain previous permission of their Congress committees before working in such ‘Krishak Sangha’. The Congress committee should take disciplinary actions against those Congress workers who join ‘Krushak Sanghas’ without such previous permission." The resolution was moved by Jagannath Mishra of Puri and was supported by Jagannath Mishra zamindar and MLA of Puri. Godavarish Mishra, Mohan Das and Malati Devi opposed the resolution. Acharya Harihar Das spoke that such a controversial resolution should not have been tabled in this district political conference without being discussed in the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee. But he was not given any attention. 179

Many peasant and Congress meetings were also held in Balasore district. In one meeting held on 10 November 1937 at Basta which was attended by about 300 persons. They discussed about the Orissa Tenancy Amendment Bill. Mukunda Prasad Das asked the audience to establish Congress Committee in every village and take to the cultivation of cotton. Another speaker urged for free manufacture of salt, prohibition of all intoxicants, boycott of foreign goods and abolition of dowry system. They asked people not to fear the police

179 Ibid.
A similar meeting of the Kisans was held at Khaparipada Mela (Balasore District) on 4 November 1937 in which emphasis was laid on the removal of untouchability, reduction of rent, opening of a dispensary at Bhandaripokhari and removal of the southern embankment of the river Baitarani. Several meetings of the Kisan Sabha and Congress were held during 1937-1939 at village level in Soro, Bhograi, Bhadrak, Remuna, and Balasore. In these meetings the speakers urged upon the villagers to pay any illegal tax to the zamindars and to enrol them in Congress. Harekrishna Mahatab, Nabakrushna Chaudhury, Guruchandra Das, Nanda Kishore Das and other senior leaders attended these meetings. They passed resolutions condemning the zamindari system. The Congress party activists continued to address Krishak meetings and laid stress on the fact that Krishak movement is by no means divorced from the Congress party's programme. The Congress leaders urged the Collector of Bhadrak for right to have free association with political parties and attend meetings.

---


181 Ibid.

182 Ibid. D.O.No.296/C, 10 October 1937, Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary. Also D.O. No.317/C, 10 November 1937, Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary.

183 Ibid. See Fortnightly Confidential report, 9 May 1937 and 21 May 1937, Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary.

184 Ibid.

185 There is a reference that the people of Khaira (Balasore district) lodged a complaint against the Police Sub-Inspector prevented the residents in his area from attending Congress meetings organized by Mukunda Prasad Das. See Fortnightly Confidential Report from Collector of Balasore to Chief Secretary, 21 May 1937 in ibid.
Peasant agitation also spread to zamindari areas. For instance, in Khalikote zamindari the peasants demanded remission of rent. They organised meetings on 9th and 10th May 1939 in Khallikote and Athagada in which large number of peasants participated. In the meeting they decided to negotiate with the Raja of Khallikote for remission of rent.186

**British attitude towards nationalist leadership and the peasant movement:**

The Government issued orders prohibiting the government servants from joining political movements during the non-cooperation movement and the civil disobedience movement. Consequently, many Government servants were dismissed from their job during the non-cooperation movement and the civil disobedience movement. They were not allowed to join their job after the movements were over and also not granted pensions.187 The Government adopted a tough stand against its pensioners who took part in the anti-government activities. During the non-cooperation movement, the government gave clear instructions on the action to be initiated towards the government pensioners who joined the non-cooperation movement. G Rainy, the Chief Secretary in his note dt.22.4.1921 gave clear instructions that "If

---

186 Govt. of Orissa, *Home Dept., Special Section*, D.O.No.1691-C, 17 May 1939, Fortnightly Confidential reports from Collector of Cuttack to Chief Secretary.
a pensioner takes an open part in the agitation, his pension should be stopped at once. It is not politics but revolution." He gave this order when it was brought to his notice that dozens of police pensioners took part in the non-cooperation movement. However, the government was careful in implementing the above order and took into account the facts and circumstances of each particular case so as to avoid conferring, cheap martyrdom on those pensioners who courted arrest with a view to enhance their popularity.

The government proscribed seditious literatures and prosecuted its authors or publisher. In this regard G. Rainy, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, advised the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Crime and Railways that "If a prosecution is considered advisable and that the name of the author known, an order under section 196 of the criminal procedure code, should at once be applied for authorising some officer of the Department to complain against him. If the author was not known, complaints were lodged against the keeper of the press. If neither the author nor the keeper or

---

188 Note of G. Rainy, 22.4. 1921, in Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special Branch, Confidential, F.No. 229/1921.
189 Note of S. Sinha, 24.6.1921 in Ibid. Also see Letter from G. Rainy, Chief Secretary, Ranchi, 24.4.1921, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department; reply of Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, (Political) vide letter no.1042, Simla, 15.6.1921 to the Chief Secretary (Govt. of Bihar & Orissa). On the question of withdrawal of pensions from ex-Govt. servants who took part in the non-cooperation movement the Government of India's advice was to give special emphasis to the nature and extent of the pensioners participation in the movement; letter no. 1325-29 - C, 10.7.1921 from the Chief Secretary to the Commissioners of all divisions in Bihar & Orissa, in Government of Bihar & Orissa, Political Department, Special Section, F.No. 22/9/1921.
the press is known, no action can of course be taken until information has been obtained as to the persons concerned in the publication."  

The Government took a very careful step while initiating prosecution of the persons concerned in the publication of the leaflets. Where a long-time had elapsed since the date of the forfeiture of the literature the Government did not take any action as it apprehended that such prosecutions might result in giving greater publicity to the leaflets and might revive interest in them. The government categorised the in to three classes i.e. 1.anonymous leaflets (2) pseudonymous leaflets and (3) leaflets that had the name of the real author. Anonymous leaflets were further divided into two categories i.e. (a) leaflets having the name or the press but not that of the author and (b) leaflets that contained no names. In the case of leaflets, falling under category (1) (a) the keeper of the press was considered the author. If the keeper of the press claimed that he was not the author, he was given the responsibility to identify the author. Concerning the leaflets coming under category (2) and (3) above the government secured the manuscript of the leaflets in question and other evidences for identifying the author for prosecution. The authorities searched

\[190\text{ Letter No.1140 C, Ranchi, 15.6.1921, Chief Secretary to D.I.G., Crime & Railways, Government of Bihar & Orissa, Political Department, Special Branch, F.No.208/ 1921.}  
\[191\text{ Ibid.}  
\[192\text{ Letter No. 6269-S.B., Patna, 30.4.1921, from Deputy Inspector General of Police, Crime & Railways, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar & Orissa, Political Department, Special Branch, F.No. 208/ 1921.} \]
the press seized the books, manuscripts etc. and other evidences such as press account books, and other books, which were likely to contain references to the authors were also seized. A complaint was lodged against the author and the press under section 124 A or 153 A as the case may be before leaflets were proscribed.\(^{193}\) Thus under the press law i.e. the Indian Press and Book Registration act (Act XXV of) 1867 the editor, the printer, the publishers, the pressmen and the hawker of the paper containing defamatory publications were all liable to be prosecuted and punished.\(^{194}\)

The British Government considered seditious and violent agitation against its administration as "grave misconduct".\(^{195}\) Official support was withdrawn from the newspapers that advocated Non-cooperation Movement by withdrawing official advertisements and reducing subscriptions to the newspapers.\(^{196}\) The British Government did not think it wise to treat the non-cooperation movement too lightly. The Chief Secretary of Bihar and Orissa in his note expressed his opinion that:-

\(^{193}\) Ibid.


\(^{195}\) See Letter no. A-9340-1 (A-G-8), 16.3. 1922, from G. Fell, Secretary to the Government of India, Army Department to the Secretary to the Government of Punjab, Home Military Dept., in Ibid.

\(^{196}\) Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special Section, Confidential F.No. 350/1920, Letter no. 4513, 16 November 1920 from Secretary, Government of India Home Department, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar & Orissa.
"It is difficult to imagine a more unfortunate inauguration of self-government in India then a movement of this kind, the whole object of which is to destroy the prestige and authority of Government. Many of the features of the movement are expressly designed to lower the prestige or Government and bring it into contempt."\(^{197}\)

The British viewed the non-cooperation movement not as a political agitation or even a definite movement but a 'general and impossible attempt to paralyse Government and bring about a revolution without a thought of what was to follow'.\(^{198}\) The Government approved the enrolment of the peons of Zamindars and planters as special constables during the non-cooperation movement, if the Zamindars and the persons concerned agreed.\(^{199}\) It advocated strong action against all persons who could be proved to have incited others to commit acts of violence or to commit offences. Strict instructions were given to keep under close observation the working of the Kisan Sabhas and Seva Samitees in order to ascertain whether these bodies were resorting to unlawful methods. The view that the Government took on the non-cooperation movement was widely circulated among all the Government Departments and through them.

\(^{197}\) Government of Bihar and Orissa Political Department, Special Section, F. No. 144, 1921, Note of G. Rainy Chief Secretary, Regarding attitude of the Govt. towards the non-cooperation movement.

\(^{198}\) Note of H. LeMeasurier, Governor of Bihar & Orissa, 21.1.1921, in Ibid, p. 9.

\(^{199}\) Ibid., Annexure to Order in Council, 22.101921; Also see Note of G. Rainy, 28.1.1921, & his letter No. 161 C, Patna, 31 January 1921, to the District Officers.
to the public. The Government felt it necessary to organise propaganda for cooperation with Government and enlisted all reasonable persons who cooperated with the Government.\textsuperscript{200}

During the civil disobedience movement, the government of Orissa demanded security deposits from newspapers and the deposit was forfeited in case the papers encouraged the movement.\textsuperscript{201} The security deposit so forfeited was not returned after the movement was over. However, in 1938 during the tenure of the Congress ministry the security deposits were refunded.\textsuperscript{202} During the civil disobedience movement, the Utkal Provincial Congress committee was declared unlawful \textsuperscript{203}and its funds were forfeited.\textsuperscript{204} The volunteer training camps organised by the Congress were dissolved.\textsuperscript{205} The colonial authorities adopted several measures to combat the national movement. Deputy Magistrates and police persons of the Criminal Investigation Department were asked to submit their report to the Government after attending the meeting about the nature of speeches

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{201} Govt. of India, \textit{Home Dept., Political}, F. No. 18/1/ 1932, Fortnightly confidential report from Orissa for the second half of January 1932.
\textsuperscript{202} See confidential letter No. 840-c, 26.3.1938, from the Chief Secretary Govt. of Orissa to the Secretary, Home Dept. Govt. of India in Govt. of Orissa, \textit{Home Dept., Special Section}, F.No. 9/1938.
\textsuperscript{203} Govt. of India, \textit{Home Dept., Political Branch}, F. No. 18/1//1932, Fortnightly Confidential Report for the second half of January 1932.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., also see D.O. letter No. 85-c.c., 19 May 1932 P.C. Tallents, Chief Secretary to the Secretary to the Govt. of India, Home Dept., in Govt. of India, \textit{Home Dept., Political}, F.No. 18/8/1932.
\textsuperscript{205} Govt. of India, \textit{Home Dept., Political Branch} F.No. 18/1/1932, Fortnightly Report from Bihar and Orissa for the second half of January 1932.
delivered by the leaders including the functions attended by the ministers or speakers of the Assembly.\textsuperscript{206} When the speeches were found seditious from the Government point of view, the speakers were prosecuted. Government also prosecuted such persons who did not co-operate for subscribing to the War Fund. One such case of prosecution was that of Gokul Chandra Mishra, a Congress activist from Koraput who was sentenced to four months rigorous imprisonment for telling people not to subscribe to the War Fund. Another Congress activist Nityananda Mahapatra of Balasore was prosecuted for making objectionable remarks against the Government. In another case, Shyam Sundar Senapati of Puri was prosecuted under Defence of India Rules for delivering objectionable speeches against the Government. He was however discharged on giving apologies with an undertaking not to indulge in political activities of an objectionable nature in future.\textsuperscript{207}

As a measure to disrupt the communication system of the nationalist leaders, their correspondences and telegrams addressed to districts level leaders and political activists were withheld during the civil disobedience movement. Press telegrams were also censored. Some newspapers, which expressed sympathy or support to the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{206} Government of Orissa, \textit{Home Department, Special Branch}, F.No. KW 7/1937.
\item \textsuperscript{207} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Congress programme, were intercepted at the railway station and their circulation was stopped.\textsuperscript{208}

While the movement for ameliorating the condition of the peasantry was going on in a full swing in Orissa the Government advertised for sale of 145 estates in Orissa who did not pay land revenue to the Government. The four estates sold in response to the government advertisement in April 1937 fetched a price of 10 times higher than its actual land revenue demand from the estates.\textsuperscript{209} This shows the government motive to earn profit even without looking into why the estates defaulted in making their revenue demand paid to the state. In this context, it may be emphasised that the peasant movement led by the Kisan Sangha and the Congress helped the peasantry to become increasingly aware of their rights. These organisations also inspired the peasants to withheld payment of illegal taxes to their estate owners. Moreover, the peasants were unable to pay the arrears rents due to the flood of 1936, which had damaged their standing crops. The no-rent campaign had also its impact on the rent collection, which had a decreasing trend from 1936 onwards. At this juncture the government policy of selling the defaulting Estates were perhaps to weaken the peasant movement as the policy of selling the

\textsuperscript{208} Govt. of India, \textit{Home Dept., Political Branch}, F.No. 18/1/1932, Fortnightly Report from Bihar and Orissa for the second half of January 1932.

\textsuperscript{209} Fortnightly Report From the Collector of Puri to the Chief Secretary, 24.9 1937( TFU Papers, NAI, Acc.640).
defaulting estates was a well thought out plan that aimed at giving the message to the estate holders to adopt stringent methods to realise arrears of rent and revenue. This fact may be related to the starvation deaths at that time in Kakatkpur area of Puri District. Through the government was well aware of the starvation deaths and had set-up non-official inquiry\textsuperscript{210} to know details of the starvation deaths yet what it failed to understand was that the natural calamities like flood and drought dwindled the peasant economy and precipitated agrarian distress as a result of which the tenants were unable to pay their rent in time. Therefore, the decision for selling the defaulting estates may be seen as a policy to ensure steady collection of rent and at the same time to crush the peasant movement with the help of the proprietary class.

A similar report on the Khallikote Zamindari corroborates the above assumption. When the Raja of Khallikote appealed the Government for police help for realising rent from his tenants.\textsuperscript{211} The government promptly supplied the police force in the name of maintaining law and order.\textsuperscript{212} However, the presence of the police in the villages aimed at creating fear among the tenants who were compelled to pay the rent by

\textsuperscript{210} Fortnightly report from Collector of Puri, 9.9. 1937, in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{211} Government of India, Home Dept., Political, F. No. 18/7/ 1938Fortnightly report from Orissa for second half of July 1938.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid; Government of India Home Department, Political, F. No. 18/9/ 1938, Fortnightly Report from Orissa for the Second Half of September 1938.
any means and thus protected the interests of the proprietary class.213

The speeches made by the Kisan Sangha activists in various public platforms offended the government authorities in local areas that reported some of the speeches as objectionable and seditious and suggested the government to ban the Kisan Sangha as an unlawful association. However, to declare the Sangha as an unlawful association the government had to satisfy itself that the activities of the Sangha were subversive and that it interfered with the maintenance of law and order and constituted a danger to the public peace.214 As the local authorities failed to establish these facts, the Sangha could not be declared as unlawful.215 The Legal Remembrancer of Orissa, whose comments was sought on this matter, suggested that the only way to take action against the Kisan Sangha movement was to make individual

---

213 This policy of the Government of Orissa was in accordance with the Government of India's recommendation for the protection of the proprietary rights and interests of the Taluqders and Zamindars in respect of lands and land revenue etc., Government of India Reforms Office, F. No.84/35G. (A) 7 K.W., Notes, pp. 1-2. As a contemporary writer Freda Utley pointed out, "British rule in India is based on the support of the land holding aristocracy: consequently, the aim of British policy has always been to favour and protect the old feudal land owning classes whilst at the same time it has sought to maintain the ryot on the land and not allow his final expropriation and conversion in to a landless proletariat." See Freda Utley, *Lancashire and the Far East*, Gorge Allen and Unwin, London, 1931. Moreover, the British colonial policy in India was to enhance the personal authority of the landlord class for its economic interest and therefore the Government patronised the landlords at the time of peasant protest movements even though it was aware that there was just reason for which the peasants protested. For a background of colonial policy see J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma, and Netherlands India*, Cambridge University Press, 1948, Chapter-1, pp.1-10. Also see Peter Harnetty, "The Landlords and the Raj: The Malguzars of the Central Provinces, 1861-1921, *Studies in History*, New Series, vol.3, no.2, July-December 1987, pp.187-209 (p.209).


215 Note of Legal Remembrancer, Orissa, 7.7. 1937 in Ibid.
prosecutions in respect of specific meetings where seditious speeches were delivered.\textsuperscript{216} Accordingly, the Criminal Investigation Department suggested the Chief Secretary for prosecution of the speakers of the Kisan Sangha under Section 153-A, Indian Penal code, in order to stop dissemination of hatred against the Zamindaras.\textsuperscript{217} The government however decided not to take any action against the activists of Kisan Sangha unless there was definite incitement to the tenants not to pay rent to the landlords or to behave violently towards them.\textsuperscript{218}

The Superintendent of Police, Cuttack made critical note of the advice and support given by Malati Choudhury to Sukinda Peasants and tribal on the issue of cutting away of trees without permission. He wrote "Malati Devi's speech appeared to be seditious and actionable because by promising support to the Kols she was abetting disregard to the law and disaffection between tenants and landlords, by virtue of her position in the Kisan Sangha Malati Devi had every right to speak on behalf of the Sabha and her utterances should be viewed as carrying considerable weight."\textsuperscript{219} Therefore, he sought the permission to proceed against Malati Choudhury under section 108 of the Criminal Procedure Code in order to present her from delivering inflammatory

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{216} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{218} D.O. No. 175 / C, 23 June 1937, from DM Balasore to Chief Secretary, in Government of Orissa, \textit{Home Department, Special Branch}, F. No. 158 / 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Confidential Letter No. 166/C, 9 February 1938, from SP Cuttack to SP, C.I.D. Orissa; Extract from confidential Diary of the SP, Cuttack, in Government of Orissa, Home Political.
\end{itemize}
speeches anywhere in Orissa and particularly debarring her of any public speech in Sukinda, Korai. Dharmasala and Barchana areas where the tree cutting cases gave considerable anxiety to the Government.220 On this issue, the District Magistrate of Cuttack wrote to the S.P C.I.D Orissa suggesting him to take strict action against Malati Choudhury under Section 108 of the Criminal Procedure Code. He mentioned that "The statement (of Malati Choudhury) that the Kisan Sangha would support the cutting of the trees in Sukinda was definitely dangerous. If speeches of this nature are allowed to continue the situation there will rapidly become serious."221

However, no action was taken against Malati Devi as P.T. Mansfield, Chief Secretary, recorded his opinion on the issue that the speech of Malati Devi was not so objectionable as to warrant prosecution under section 108 of criminal procedure code.

Thus, acquittal of Malati Choudhury may be related to the fact that the Government was well aware that prosecution of leaders gave them undue popularity,222 which the government wanted to avoid as a policy to discourage the peasant movement.

---

220 Ibid.
221 Confidential D.O.No. 6, 10 February 1938, from DM Cuttack to SP, C.I.D., Orissa, in Ibid.
222 Note of P.T. Mansfield, Chief Secretary, 24.2.1938 in Ibid.
Conclusion:

By the end of 1920's there occurred an awakening among the masses, and the peasantry had developed a 'keener sense of their rights, and a stouter spirit of self-assertion and resistance', and took a livelier interest in public questions.223 This awakening of the masses was an important development in the late colonial period. The non-cooperation movement was the first experiment of mass political hostility against the British Raj in an all India basis that 'elicited from the British a changed attitude to political agitation' and the need for 'continual reformulation of political strategy in a rapidly changing context'.224 But this change in British policy was designed to protect the colonial interest and did not bring any radical change in the economic condition of the masses particularly in Orissa.

The peasant movement under the Kisan Sangha could be best described as a prelude to a greater mass movement, organised to attain the long cherished goal i.e. complete independence that came in the shape of the Quit India Movement in 1942. It saw large-scale participation of the masses i.e. peasants, tribal, workers and others. The socialist brand of leaders helped in the process of bringing to light the

grassroots level agrarian problems and radicalised the peasantry who actively participated in the agrarian agitation under the banner of the Utkal Kisan Sagha. Till then there was a thin line between demarcating the elitist and the masses. The movement gave an opportunity to both the parties to come closer for a greater mass movement. It helped the leaders to understand the real problem in concrete terms and ultimately led to their accessibility and acceptability by the masses. They started feeling the pulse of the masses better than before.

The Congress consolidated its position and achieved its mass base in rural areas by helping in the formation of the village wing of the peasant organisations such as the Kisan Sabha and the Lok Sabha.225 The village people took keen interest in the meetings of the Kisan Sabha and Lok Sabha and the Congress, as the issues discussed in the meetings had a direct appeal to their own interest. The activities of the Kisan Sangha and the Congress highlighted the genuine grievances of the peasants and thus exerted pressure on the government.

A close observation of the activities of the Kisan Sangha and the Congress in Orissa would reveal that they initially fought for a common goal of uniting the peasant masses and then to involve them in the anti-colonial political activities. This period also witnessed the attempt of the

225 The organisation of the Kisan Sangha and taking up of the agrarian question by the Congress was in many respects aimed at furthering the 'long term goal of the national movement'. See Bipan Chandra, Indian National Movement: The Long Term Dynamics, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988, p. 78.
peasant leaders to win over the support of the townsmen to the peasants cause. Resolutions were passed unanimously for abolition of the Zamindary system, mutation fees, and demands were placed for appointment of experts to teach better method of cultivation, construction of strong embankments, reduction of water rates, better irrigation facilities, rights over trees, and amendments in the Forest Rules and tenancy laws, abolition of bethi, non payment of illegal taxes etc. The speeches shaped the mind of the peasants in creating greater awareness of the socio-economic and political problems that the country faced under the colonial rule. The British response to these movements and demands was not favourable. The colonial government adopted several measures to combat the national movement and the peasant movement. During the non-co-operation and the civil disobedience movement, the government gave clear instruction on action to be initiated against the leaders and the press and considered seditious and violent agitation against its administration as grave misconduct. Strict instructions were given to keep under close observation the working of the Kisan Sangha and Seva Samitees in order to ascertain whether these bodies were resorting to unlawful methods. Government organised propaganda seeking co-operation from the people for smooth running of its administration. However it failed to provide a clear policy towards the existing agrarian problems.
The Kanika agitation was a by-product of the agrarian discontentment among its tenantry. The political developments of the time exposed the tyrannical rule of the Raja. The British Government naturally did not want to lose the traditional influence exercised by the ruling Chiefs and the Zamindars at a time when the growing spirit of nationalism threatened its own administration.

The agrarian agitation in coastal Orissa, that were guided either by the Congress or the Kisan Sabha or both, was initially anti-landlord in nature but it gradually developed an anti-government character and hence to form a joint forum of struggle in association with the Congress. The political conferences and the peasant conferences that were organised during the 1936-39 phase widened the mass base of the Congress and at the same time, it pushed forward the demands of the peasantry. The provincial election of 1937 and the formation of Congress Ministry generated high expectations among the peasantry. The agrarian legislation introduced by the Congress Ministry, however well intended, failed to solve the distress faced by the agrarian community. However, it revealed the limitations of a partial administrative autonomy. By the end of 1939 the discontented leaders and the peasants could foresee the inevitability of a greater movement to secure their just rights by putting an end to the British rule. The period that followed witnessed intensive struggle with the colonial government.