Chapter VI

Bakasht Struggle in Monghyr

We have already indicated in Chapter I the reasons for the choice of our study of bakasht struggles in Monghyr. Before we examine the actual struggles we give below an account of the land and the people of Monghyr particularly the South of the district. Then we state the problems of bakasht lands in comparison with the problem in Gaya. It is held here that the problem of bakasht was the problem of land eviction, threatened land eviction or denial of occupancy rights to the tenants in these lands which involved thousands of bighas. The bakasht struggle is examined on the basis of the hypothesis that the gradual development of the struggle was run on communist lines.

Land and the People

The existence of Monghyr as a separate executive centre is traced back to 1812 when Swig was appointed to have charge of the Monghyr Criminal Court of the Joint Magistrate of Monghyr, and, he was subordinate to the Magistrate of Bhagalpur, bearing to him somewhat the relation of a modern Sub-divisional Officer. It was in 1832 that the district was constituted, when it was determined to erect it into a revenue receiving centre under the name of a Deputy Collectorship. This was done by transferring several parganas from the districts of Bhagalpur, Bihar and Tirhut. The following parganas were transferred: Surajgarh, Monghyr, Chandanbhuka, Kajra Pharikiya, Abhaipur and Gidhaur from Bhagalpur; parganas Amarthu, Roh (in part), Karhat (in part), Maldah, Bihar (in part), and samai (in part) from the
district of Bihar; and Malki, Ballia, Masjidpur, Akbarpur Rani, Bhusar, Badaphusari, Naipur, Imadpur Kakkhand and Utarkhand from the district of Tirhut.

Since then the district continued to grow. In 1834 pargana, Chakei was transferred from the district of Ramgarh and in 1839 pargana Bishzari was transferred from the district of Patna. In 1874 large portions of Bhagalpur were transferred viz. Sakhrabadi, Darra, Singhaul, Kharagpur and Parbatpara. The Sub-division of Jammui was formed in 1864 with headquarters at Sikandra which was transferred to Jammui. The Begusarai subdivision was formed in 1870 with headquarters at Begusarai. In 1904-5 Sheikhpura thana was transferred from Jammui to the Monghyr subdivision. In 1943-44 Khagaria subdivision was established with headquarters at Khagaria.

Survey and Settlement Operations

The first provisional survey was carried out between 1835 and 1838 in pargana Pharkiya by Lt. Egerton. This was done with the object of determining wairana lands i.e. tracts of waste lands outside the orbit of the settled and cultivated villages, to which it was held that the Permanent Settlement did not extend. The survey was confined to boundaries only. Captain Sherwill carried out a more accurate survey in the rest of the Pharkiya pargana in 1845-47. This was called a revenue survey. A survey of diara lands took place in 1865-66. The Srinagar Banaili estate in North Monghyr, with an area of 174 square miles, was surveyed and settled between 1887 and 1894; 47 square miles in thanas Teghra and Begusarai were surveyed in
1895-96 in connection with the settlement of the Narhan Estate (1897-1898). In North Monghyr the survey was conducted during 1899-1904. The remaining area of South Monghyr was surveyed during 1905-1912.

Area of South Monghyr

The survey and settlement report on South Monghyr concerned the thanas of Monghyr, Jamalpur, Kharagpur, Chakai, Jammu, Sikandra, Sheikhpura, Lakhisarai and Surajgarh extending over 2,145 square miles.

The area falls into eight natural divisions: (a) An alluvial strip along the Ganges bearing heavy rabi crop; (b) the two hill blocks of Kharagpur and Gidheshwar; (c) the block of low country east of the Kharagpur hills, similar to adjoining thanas of Bhagalpur; (d) the tal area in the extreme northwest, characterised by a heavy soil and yearly inundations of the Ganges; (e) the well wooded area of the Barbigha outpost of Sheikhpura thana; (f) the main central plain of Sikandra thana with the southern portions of thanas Sheikhpura and Lakhisarai, characterised by the absence of trees and the predominance of rice over all other crops; (g) the undulating country south of the Kharagpur and Gidheshwar hills.

Thanas Monghyr and Jamalpur consist almost entirely of the alluvial strip (a) which is partly actual diara and partly low lying land, which is occasionally but not invariably flooded.

Thana Kharagpur embraces the greater part of the Kharagpur

1 P.C. Roy Chaudhuri, Bihar District Gazeteers, Monghyr (Patna, 1960), p. 269; and P.W. Murphy, op. cit.
hill block (b) and the whole of the area (c), which is similar to the western Bhagalpur country.

**Thanana Jammui** includes the whole of the Gidheshwar hills (b) and for the rest consists to a small extent of the Central plain area (f), and to a large extent of the undulating country (g).

**Thanana Sikandra** is entirely situated in the main central plain (f), except in so far as a portion of the jungle at the foot of the Gidheshwar hills falls in that thana. Of thana Sheikhpura about one-half is the well wooded area (e), one-third central plain (f), and one-sixth Tal area (d).

Of thana Lakhisarai about one-half is Tal area (d), one-quarter central plain (f), while of the remaining quarter about half is alluvial (a), and half Kharagpur hill block (b).

Finally, thana Surajgarh is about half alluvial (a), and half Kharagpur hill block (b).

In the Tal area extending into a number of thanas of the district and into Patna district the hukasht struggles were concentrated. This area consists of lands which remain under water throughout rains. In this tract there is hardly any tree to be seen. The village sites are raised high, above the surrounding country, and in the rainy seasons are practically unapproachable. No rice is grown in this tract except in a few places where the construction of bandhs has enabled the raiyats to keep out the water which would otherwise flood these lands, but magnificent rabi crops are obtained in winters.

Anyone travelling the main line from Kiul to Patna would notice a seemingly endless vista of countryside, covering mile
after mile from Lakhisarai to Mokameh and running parallel to the Ganges. The eastern half of this Tal region, which is a tract of over hundred square miles wears a deserted look in the scorching summer. It is known as the Barahiya Tal and forms the north-western boundary of Monghyr district lying at a distance of forty miles from the headquarters town. This portion of the Tal area had about eight villages in the area namely Karampur, Pali Mahram Chak, Kothwa, Fadarpore, Saroda, Dhanpur, Lizampur, Akbarpur etc. commanding a population of nearly 8000 people. They were cultivating land of that area "...but at the time of the last survey the landlords arranged to enlist those lands as bakasht land in Khatiyan. The rest of the lands recorded as tenancy lands in the name of the tenants are almost all covered into bakasht lands through registration, rent suits and by main force of physical strength."

Rainfall in Monghyr: The average rainfall of Monghyr was 64.91 inches in 1924-25, 46.33 inches in 1934-35 and 56.32 inches in 1944-45. In South Monghyr the average annual rainfall appeared to be 47 inches, the figures for Monghyr town for 46 years before the survey being 47.19 inches, for Jammui for 30 years 46.91 inches and Sheikhpura recorded 55.6 inches in the six years preceding the survey.

The average distribution is one and a half inches from November to February, three inches from March to May, and forty two and a half inches from June to October. The rain of the

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2 Report of the C.I.D., Patna, 27th October 1938, Government of Bihar, Political Department (Special Confidential) file no. 42(III)/1938.
later half of September and the beginning of October is really the most important in the year. The rainfall during this period is of immense benefit for the rabi crops, giving them enough moisture to make a good start before the ground gets too hard to enable the young plants to break through it.

Agriculture: South of the Ganges the cultivated area lies chiefly in the basin of the Kiuil river and its tributaries and in nagana Kharagpur, where the largest area is under winter rice. The tract to the north of the Sheikhpura and west of Lakhisarai which is also liable to inundation, is nearly all devoted to bhadoi and rabi crops. South of the Ganges bears rabi crops in the quasi diara tract along the bank of the Ganges. Between Jamalpur and Lakhisarai, there are excellent rice lands, which yield exceptional crops in seasons free from floods. To the north-west, the portion of the Sheikhpura thana lying between the South Bihar and East Indian Railway lines comprises two fairly distinct tracts. The eastern portion is liable to inundation from the Halahar river and has heavy soil growing good rabi crop. The western portion which is irrigated but not flooded by the Sakri river, produces winter rice, rabi crop being comparatively insignificant.

The following table shows the area under different crops in the whole district.
Table No. 6.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bhadoi Acres</th>
<th>Aghani Acres</th>
<th>Rabi Acres</th>
<th>Twice cropped Acres</th>
<th>Net cropped area Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Monghyr</td>
<td>288,682</td>
<td>198,094</td>
<td>447,707</td>
<td>675,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Monghyr</td>
<td>148,545</td>
<td>428,968</td>
<td>407,494</td>
<td>794,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>437,227</td>
<td>627,062</td>
<td>852,201</td>
<td>1,469,471</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Irrigation: In South Monghyr artificial irrigation is practised on a wide scale. It covers about 42 per cent of the net cropped area. There are three kinds of irrigation:

(a) artificial water channels called pains;
(b) artificial reservoirs called ahars;
(c) wells. There is also a system of distributaries leading off from a reservoir at Xharagpur to the north-east. Well irrigation is used chiefly for sugarcane and vegetables, especially potatoes. There are a number of pakka or masonry wells and every year a large number of Kachha or earthen wells are dug, which last a few seasons.

Population: The following table indicates the growth of population of the whole district:
Table No. 6.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>20,70,191</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>21,35,000</td>
<td>+ 64,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>20,29,965</td>
<td>- 1,05,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>22,87,154</td>
<td>+ 2,57,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>25,64,544</td>
<td>+ 2,77,390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


At the time of 1901 the population increase was 1.6 per cent over the previous census year. In 1911 the increase was by 3.1 per cent; in 1921 the decrease was by 4.92 per cent owing to mortality from cholera, plague and fever; in 1931 the increase was 12.6 per cent and in 1941 it was 12.13 per cent.

During 1901 and 1911 population increased in South Monghyr from 10,36,925 in 1901 to 11,27,647 in 1911. According to the Survey and Settlement report the population of the South was increasing more rapidly than that in the north. The whole district had registered 6 per cent increase while as in the South the increase was ten per cent.

Population Dependent on Agriculture

Seventy per cent of the population was dependent on agriculture. In the South it was somewhat less than in the north,
as it contained the two towns of Monghyr and Jamalpur, the population of which was largely non-agricultural. Of the total population fifty per cent were rent payers, one per cent rent receivers and thirteen per cent labourers.

Agricultural Classes: During the reign of the Mughals the largest land holders were Kazis, Malliks, Mirs, Mirzas and Shahs. The south of the district was held by the houses of Kharagpur, which declined. Its estates were bought by the Maharaja of Darbhanga. The principal landholders in south of the Ganges were the Maharaja of Gidhaur and the purchasers of the Khaira estates. The latter belonged to the Goenka family. Kedar Nath Goenka owned four annas of it. The managing proprietor was Badri Nath Goenka.

In course of time owing to prosperity of the professional and commercial classes, the operation of the sale laws and the indebtedness of the landholding classes, other classes such as Banwars, Agarwals and Narwaris rose to the position of the landlords. There were also a few instances in which mendicants or sanyasi classes acquired wealth and importance, as for instance the Mahants of Dularpur and of Suja.

As is already mentioned in chapter II the landlords in Monghyr "had generally enhanced the rents of the tenants..." in contravention of the provisions of Bengal Tenancy Act. In the latter category were found the Maharaja of Gidhaur and the Kumar of Khaira.

3 J.R. Dain, Commissioner of Bhagalpur's Report to Mr. Brett, Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department, File No. 6(a)/1336.
Tenure holders were principally Babhans, Rajputs, Kurmis, Sheikhs, Christian indigo planters and Chatwals. The majority of them cultivated the best lands in their tenure, while they settled the rest with others at advantageous rates of rent, so as to leave them a margin of profit after paying the zamindar his dues. The lessees were frequently occupancy raiyats. In north longhyr the number of holdings of this class was 2,82,332 or more than 89 per cent of the total number of occupied holdings; and over 81 per cent of the occupied area was held by tenants with occupancy rights. The average size of a holding, i.e., the area held by tenants under a single landlord, was nearly 2½ acres. It was least in Teghra and Begusarai, which were the domain of petty landlords and subdivision of proprietary interest. It was greatest in Gogri, which was generally owned by comparatively big landlords. Barely one in 500 holdings had been recorded as held by raiyats at fixed rents or rates of rent, and only 1,871 acres were so held. Non-occupancy holdings accounted for over three per cent of the total number of holdings and average nearly 3½ acres in size.

In south longhyr the situation was similar. For example, in Surajgarh area raiyats held lands on fixity of rents. These raiyats were "successors of the old gorabandi raiyats who were locally recognised as possessing the right to hold on a fixed rate of rent. Before the passing of the Tenancy Act they were practically the only tenants with recognised rights of occupancy. Their old pattas have mostly been lost and as their rights and status were never formally recorded, they have ceased to be known as gorabandi raiyats, and cannot now be distinguished from
the raiyats on whom the Bengal Tenancy Act has conferred rights of occupancy. Their rents in many cases have been enhanced, and the burden of proof about these enhancements had fallen on the tenants since they could not prove their distinctive title as gorabandi raiyats".

Among occupancy and non-occupancy raiyats Babhans, Goallas, Koiris, Dhanuks, Brahmans, Raiputs, Kurmis, Santhals, and the various sections of muslims formed the bulk. Agricultural labourers were mainly recruited from among low castes, such as the Lasahars, Bhuiyas and Dosadhs.

Estates: According to the collectorate returns, the number of estates on the revenue roll in 1923-24 was 9,397 including 9,300 permanently settled estates, 68 temporarily settled and 29 government managed estates. The estates on the revenue roll of 1950-51 had come to 10,360 including 10,222 permanently settled estates, 56 temporarily settled estates and 32 estates held by Government management. The increase in the number of estates was the result of subdivision of property or sub-infeudation.

Distribution of Estates in Different Thanas of the District

Begusarai thana contained diara estates covering an area of over 28 square miles, of which the majority was within fairly easy reach of Begusarai town, and the remainder was just opposite the town. There were also inland estates grouped round Sisauni, about six miles north of the railway near the Bur Gandak

4 P.W. Murphy, *op. cit.*, para 97.
river, which covered, an area of two square miles. The largest estates were Arazi Bhawanandpur with an area of over seventeen square miles, Jafarnagar nearly five square miles in extent, and Mahazi Bhawannandpur and Akbarpur Barari covering about three and a half and two square miles respectively.

In the Jogri thana there were six large estates containing mostly low lands suitable for paddy cultivation. There were found Government managed estates called Jagir Raushan Khan Naik Thana Jafra, Manik Singh Sipahi Thana Jafra and Jagir Gurdial Naik Thana Jafra.

In thana Monghyr there were Government and temporarily settled estates with an area of forty-eight square miles. There were two inland estates, Amanat Sarkar Ifahri and Bargoria, which covered barely 120 acres between them, though the lands of the former were scattered over no less than seven villages, some of which were near Jamalpur of the diara estates, Kutlupur, Tarapur and Zamin Digri were the largest, Kutlupur covering 20 square miles, Tarapur about 13 and Zamin Digri nearly 9 square miles, or 42 square miles in all. Tarapur adjoins Binda diara. Zamin Digri was close to Monghyr fort and railway station, while Kutlupur was some 14 miles west on the borders of thanas Monghyr and Surajgarh. A number of petty estates were grouped just opposite or alongside Monghyr town, and the remainder were midway between Monghyr and Kutlupur.

In Surajgarh thana, there were estates covering a little more than eight square miles, and Phero Paranpur covering a little over one square mile, were the only two of importance. Rahatpur and the petty diara estates were all fairly close to
Surajgarh, while the inland estates were grouped round Lakhisarai and Kiul.

**Problem of Bakasht:** We have already noted in Chapter II that under the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, a *raiyat* could become a "settled raiyat" and acquire rights of occupancy in all the lands he held in a village. It was not necessary that he should have held all the land for twelve years as was the case under Act X of 1859. If he held any land for twelve years in a village, he acquired occupancy rights in all the lands he held, or may in future hold, in that village. This provision implied that a *raiyat* with occupancy rights could not be ejected by the landlord as a non-occupancy *raiyat* could be ejected at the will of his landlord.

The landlords of Bihar we have noted in Chapter II resorted to all kinds of subterfuges. The peasants were deprived of their legal rights. This problem was the most pronounced in the *bakasht* lands, which meant, according to the Bihar Bakasht Disputes Settlement Act, 1947 "any land, other than proprietors private land, which a proprietor or tenure holder claims to be cultivating with his own stock or by his own servants or by hired labour".

In order to prevent the *raiyats* from having occupancy rights the landlords employed different stratagem. In Reora, Gaya the lands were sold by the landlords for arrears of rent,  

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while as according to the Bihar Tenancy Act an occupancy raiyat "shall not be ejected by his landlord from his holding, except in execution of a decree passed on the ground -

(a) that he has used the land comprised in his holding in a manner which renders it unfit for the purposes of tenancy, or

(b) that he has broken a condition consistent with the provisions of this Act, and on breach of which he is, under the terms of a contract between himself, and his landlord, liable to be ejected."

In Barahiya Tal the landlords did not give identical lands to the raiyats for cultivation every year and thus they failed to get occupancy rights over the lands they cultivated for generations. As a result they had to beg of the Zamindars for settlement year after year, for which they remained naturally under an "obligation" of the landlords. This practice of the landlords went against the provisions of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 which stated in Section 20(2) "A person shall be deemed for the purposes of this section to have continuously held land in a village notwithstanding that the particular land held by him has been different at different times". As such the raiyats were employed in begari. An official report confirms that the landlords were dispossessing the tenants. In a letter to R.E. Swanzy, Commissioner of Patna, W.B. Brett said "...it is

6 The Bihar Tenancy Act, 1885, Section 25 (Patna, 1975), p. 28.

7 Ibid., p. 23.
also a fact that much of these bakasht lands are in actual cultivating possession of tenants whom in many cases the landlords are steadily attempting to dispossess. The problem expressed itself at the time of sowing and harvesting i.e. from October to April of every year because the landlords during this period attempted to forcibly prevent the raiyats to enter the so-called bakasht lands. The bakasht struggles took place during the period of rabi season.

Factors Responsible for the Rise of the Struggle

Apart from the economic discontent and stratagems of the landlords political and organizational circumstances gave rise to the struggle over bakasht lands in South Bihar in general and South Monghyr in particular. The attitude of the Congress, the role of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha and its organizational strength were responsible for the rise of the bakasht struggle. In Chapter III we noticed that by 1936 the raiyats were being rendered landless owing to the problem of rent in various districts of the province viz. Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Gaya, Patna and Monghyr. We noticed in that chapter that the Congress and the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha co-operated for their respective reasons to organize the peasants on their immediate demands till 1936.

The election manifesto of the Congress clearly indicated the intention of the Congress to improve the lot of the peasantry. The promise had its effects on both the raiyats and the

8 State Central Records Office, file no. 15/1936-37 (Arrah).
Zamindars. It raised the hopes of the tenantry, which was already organized on class lines and was moving away from the Congress ideology on the kisan issues. On the other hand it struck terror in the hearts of the Zamindars, who realised that any further continuous cultivation of land by tenants on oral Batai or on high cash rental would confer occupancy rights on the raiyats. They began ousting the raiyats from the lands which the latter had cultivated for a long time. The landlords went to the extent of claiming the crops grown by the tenants as having been grown by themselves. This attitude of the landlords was responsible for the agrarian crisis in 1936-37.

Throughout the period of our study the landlords of the Tal area attempted eviction of the raiyats from their lands in Monghyr. This was also true of the landlords in Patna and Gaya.

Attitude of the Congress: The Congress had adopted an attitude of compromise to the problems of kisans while granting them certain reforms. Fundamentally, in Bihar the Congress was collaborationist as is held later. As a result of this, if on the one hand kisans were being given consciousness of their rights, on the other hand they were being ideologically driven away into ideology of class consciousness provided by the Communists and Socialists as we have seen in Chapter IV.

Attitude of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha

The attitude of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was becoming more and more class-oriented by 1936. Organizationally

9 Awadeshwar Prasad Sinha, op. cit.
also, Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was fit to engage in a struggle, as we have seen in Chapter III. The activities of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha during 1935-36 in the district of Monghyr show that it organized seventy big meetings and 124 small meetings and six demonstrations. The membership of the Provincial Kisan Sabha was seventy thousand by 1936. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha had provided consciousness to the peasants. During this period the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was under the ideological influence of the Socialists, among whom Communists were present.

Bakasht Struggle in the Province

During 1936-1939 Bihar experienced important kisan movements, which made the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha very prominent. Gaya, Patna, Monghyr, Shahabad, Darbhanga, Champaran, and Saran witnessed the struggle. However, the movement was the strongest in Reora and Manjihiawan (Gaya), Chapra in Shahabad and Barahiya Tal in Monghyr. The movement started first in Monghyr, followed by Gaya. At both the places the local leaders, namely Karyanand Sharma and Jadunandan Sharma began the movement without the prior sanction of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, and, the decision of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.

11 Ibid.
12 M.A. Rasul, op. cit., p. 50.
13 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, op. cit., p. 517.
The Congress was conducting a campaign against the Kisan Sabha that the latter was fomenting trouble against the Congress. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, therefore, did not assume the direct leadership of the movement only as a tactic to placate the Congress. It assumed the leadership of the struggle only at its conference at Waini in December 1938. The guiding spirit of these struggles during 1936-1939 was Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, who moved from place to place coordinating the struggles and directing the workers from one phase of the struggle to another. Jadunandan Sharma while welcoming the delegates to the fourth Conference of All India Kisan Sabha at Gaya in 1939 said about Sahajanand, "...he has been too busy in running about from one place to another in order to look after and control the ceaseless and stormy struggles going on throughout the province", and described him as the "dynamo" of this movement.

**Bakasht Struggle in Monghyr**

The struggle started in Monghyr in June 1936 and continued till middle of 1939. The area of struggle as pointed out earlier was Barahiya Tal. In this connection Kisan conferences were held in October 1936 in Monghyr, February 1937 in Sheikhpura,

14 M.A. Rasul, *op. cit.*
16 Awadeshwar Prasad Sinha, ibid.
17 Jadunandan Sharma, *Address of the Chairman Reception Committee, All India Kisan Sabha, Fourth Session* (Gaya), p. 3.
October 1939 and November 1938 in Lakhisarai, and February 1939 in Pali in Tal area.

In 1936 the raiyats refused to do begari in the Barahiya Tal area. A thousand raiyats went in a body led by Karyanand Sharma to the Collector of Monghyr on April 6, 1936 and filed a written petition and discussed their grievances with the Collector. A memorial with thousands of signatures written by Karyanand Sharma was presented. Swami Sahajanand also recorded this event.

These raiyats had come from Channan pargana in Lakhisarai thana. The landlords of the area were Maharaja of Gidhaur and the Goenka family. Commissioner of Bhagalpur in his report to Brett agreed that "the pitch of rents in this part is considerably above the average for South Monghyr. The officials realised that the claims of the raiyats were just and that it was not possible for them to pay arrears of rent. A breach of peace was feared owing to the aggressiveness of the amlas of Ulao estate in Lakhisarai and notice u/s. 144 Cr. P.C. against these amlas were issued.

19 Ibid., p. 514.

20 Agrarian Trouble in Barahiya Tal Area, Monghyr, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 42(III)/1938.

21 Kisan Sabha, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department, File No. 6(a)/1936.

22 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, op. cit., p. 516.

23 Kisan Sabha, op. cit.

24 Extract from the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Monghyr, dated 17th April 1936, ibid.
As a result of the move of raiyats the landlords started their "Nadirshahi" attitude (dictatorial attitude) and took back every inch of land given to raiyats.

At this juncture the Congress intervened. Sri Krishan Sinha examined the problem. He was not the premier yet. The Congress intervention was in the nature of effecting a compromise and "equitable adjustment" between the contending parties. He was successful in bringing about some rapprochement. According to an official report the tenants' agitation of 1936 in Tal area "fizzled out as there was no well thought out modus operandi. The opinion substantiates the view of Sahajanand who felt that the Zamindars increased their attacks on the raiyats.

In this movement Congressmen were active but some responsible Congress leaders realised the gravity of the situation once the Congress formed the ministry. The situation had become tense in 1937 and initially force had to be sent. Karyanand Sharma along with nineteen others was arrested in February and released in June 1937. At the political conference held at Jammui on March 14 and 15, 1937 a committee of inquiry was formed to go immediately into the dispute between the Zamindars and

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27 *Kisan Unrest in Bihar*, *ibid.*

28 Agrarian Trouble in Barahiya Tal Area, Monghyr, *op. cit.*
raiyats of Barahiya Tal. A compromise was worked out by Rajendra Prasad. This came to be known as the Rajendra Prasad Award which "only enunciated a principle to the effect that tenants should have some land to cultivate and that the zamindars should settle at least that amount of land (choice of site and terms remaining with the landlords) with the tenants which the latter used to get for cultivation prior to the agitation which started in 1936". Swami Sahajanand felt that according to the compromise the landlords had promised to settle lands with the tenants or at least to allow lands to them without hesitation.

The Award did not satisfy all sections. The tenants regarded it as unsatisfactory. Even according to an official opinion the Award was limited for the following reasons. First, it gave permission to the landlords to shift the land given to each tenant so as to prevent the accrual of occupancy rights by him. The second was the provision absolving landlords from the necessity of granting rent receipts for produce rent so that the tenants had no documentary proof about the lands to which they were entitled. The landlords broke the Award in the ensuing cultivating season of 1937-38. The tenants complained of this breach and Srikrishna Sinha, who was now Premier intervened and

29 Ibid.


31 Agrarian Trouble in Barahiya Tal Area, ibid.; and "Kisan Unrest in Bihar", ibid.

32 Ibid.
settled the matter. According to the Statesman report, even then "...one Zamindar refused to be governed by the terms of the Prasad Award and in consequence had to be threatened with section 107 proceedings". This "one Zamindar" was Badri Narayan Sinha. A Tribunal consisting of Messrs Ram Charittar Singh, M.L.A., Namdhari Singh, President District Congress Committee, and Nathura Prasad Sinha, Secretary District Congress Committee inquired into the case and settled it. The landlords were preventing raiyats to cultivate their lands since the tenants on instructions from the Kisan Sabha had refused to render begari. The tenants got desperate because they were starving in the midst of plenty - Sag was standing in the fields and they could not take it.

1938: Area of Struggle and Landlords Involved

In 1938 the trouble assumed bigger proportions. The tenants of villages Pali, Serora, Mahramchak, Fadarpur, Kothwa, Bhanpur, Kamarpur, Akarpur of Tal area submitted a memorial to the hon'ble Prime Minister. They drew his attention "towards our miseries and if immediate steps are not taken, we fear that we will be compelled to take some constitutional, but drastic measures to safeguard our maintenance..." and promised that this extreme step would be taken as a last resort. The

33 "Kisan Unrest in Bihar", ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Agrarian Trouble in Barahiya Tal Area, op. cit.
36 Ibid.
agrarian trouble started with the advent of the rabi sowing season. The memorialists had claimed that the landlords were not observing the terms of the compromise arrived at by Rajendra Prasad Award. In the report of Sadr Subdivisional Officer to the Commissioner of Monghyr, the officer informed the latter "...I also made it clear to them (the landlords - RG) that the agitation has started in its present form as a result of the non-observance of the compromise terms by some of the Zamindars".

The following statement indicated the details of the Zamindars and the land in dispute in this year.

Table No. 6.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Village</th>
<th>No. of Houses</th>
<th>Approximate Population</th>
<th>Total area of Mehal</th>
<th>Occupancy to inhabitants</th>
<th>Bakasht</th>
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<td>2. Mahram Chak</td>
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<td>14759</td>
<td>699</td>
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Source: Agrarian Trouble in Barahiya Tal Area, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department, File No. 42(III)/1938.

37 B.K. Gokhale, Commissioner of Monghyr to J.L. Merriman, Commissioner of Bhagalpur, ibid.

38 Letter of R.R. Ghosh to Commissioner of Monghyr, ibid.
The following were the names of the then important landlords of the area: Badri Narayan Sinha, Ramasray Prasad Singh, Harangi Sinha, Harbans Narain Sinha and others, Magni Prasad Sinha and others, Nanha Prasad Sinha, Nanha Prasad Sinha (deaf), Sasobar Saran Sinha and other members of the family, Mansukhram Narwari, Baluram Narwari, Bisheswar Sinha and others, Krishan Baldev Sinha and others, Kamala Prasad Sinha.

The Barahiya Tal agitation was confined to the above named eight villages consisting of 616 families numbering about 4500 souls, comprising an area of about 15000 bighas of bakasht land. In another statement it is shown that Kusumbha and Kusumha Jhat, Police Station Sheikhpura had 500 houses, 2000 approximate population, 7000 bighas of total area of mahal, 3800 bighas of occupancy tenants and 32000 of so-called bakasht land. The important landlord being Khan Bahadur Ebrahim Hussain of Terbighat, Patna. Repura in Barahiya Police Station had 150 houses with 800 population over an area of 1400 bighas out of which 175 was in occupancy of tenants and 1225 as bakasht; in Mohamadpur, Jitwara and Pranpur Police Station Lakhisarai there were 200 houses with 1200 population over 1000 bighas of total area divided into 150 bighas for occupancy tenants and 850 as bakasht. The important landlord here was N. Jiauddin Saheb of Sakrama.

Satyagraha

When the memorialists realised that the landlords were breaking the Prasad Award, their memorial to the Prime Minister had resulted in nothing beyond some correspondence, they decided
to offer "peaceful satyagraha". The satyagraha was offered in October at the time of the sowing season. In his report dated October 12, 1938, the Superintendent of Police stated "Indications of serious trouble in the Tal area in Burhee and Sheikhpura Police Station have been reported. Pandit Karyanand Sharma has been moving about in these areas and has been trying to persuade labourers who have come from outside for the cultivating season, to desist from working for the Zamindars on their Bakasht land.... Confidential information is that Pandit Karyanand Sharma is out to create serious trouble". Karyanand Sharma made preparations for this satyagraha. In his letter dated October 7, 1938 to Anil Mitra, a student, Karyanand said that the Kisan workers were "watching the situation" and were "alert". He asked for some monetary help and expressed the need of some more workers. He also requested Anil Mitra to send a camera and a photographer.

In the beginning satyagrah was offered at four villages and later the satyagrah spread to all the eight villages mentioned above. The agitation started owing to armed provocation of the Zamindars as is evident from the incidents in the bakasht lands of Kusumbhi of Nawab Ibrahim of Terbighat who had 3200 bighas of bakasht lands here. The Government had issued notices under Section 144 Cr. P.C. on both the Zamindars and the raiyats, 

39 Letter dated 22nd October 1938 from Karyanand Sharma, Lakhisarai to Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Bihta, Patna, ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
but the Zamindar does not care". On October 10, while the men of Zamindar under leadership of Thakur Singh, Gumashta, armed with lathis (sticks) and swords began ploughing in spite of the notices served on those lands, the raiyats sat down on the lands. Then the men of the Zamindar on the order of Thakur Singh assaulted Sukar Mahto and Neghar Mahto (both koiris) and others. Sukar Mahto's head was broken. Two Congress workers namely Govind Sharma and Hari Verma were also assaulted while trying to pacify the people. This created panic in the village.

Similarly at Kothwa, Police Station Parahiya, Zulmi Singh, Zamindar of Barahiya began ploughing the disputed land on the same date. The tenants offered satyagraha. The armed men of the landlord attacked and assaulted eight men and two kisan workers, who happened to be there. The kisan workers, namely Ganaur and Dashrata (former being a koiri) received considerable injuries. The son of the landlord Chandra Shekhar used his "Gupti" (a stick hiding an iron weapon), but it hit none except a bullock. At Jitwar Police Station Lakhisarai another man Mirol Mahto (koiri) got one 'Gupti' blow which chopped his right ear off. Three other men, Parshad, Baldeo and Barwa were assaulted by the men of Sadhu-mian of Allahpur, Police Station Lakhisarai.

By October 11, as many as twenty men were injured in the Tal area.

The usual tactic of the kisans, during this period, according to an official report, was to prevent the agents of

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
landlords to forcibly plough disputed lands by offering Satyagrah in front of Zamindar's ploughs, and kisan volunteers in Red shirts moved all over the place "asking the kisans to stick to their demands and to be non-violent. Karyanand Sharma was sending the kisans themselves on the spot followed by kisan workers.

By October 15 the Satyagrah had spread to all the villages of the area. In other villages the Zamindars turned violent and did not spare women. At Maharamchak, Lachinarain Singh reploughed about four bighas of pea crop sown by Bhatoo Dhanuk on October 14, 1938. Bhatoo and his brother's wives were assaulted by Lachi Narain's men with bhalas and lathis (spears and sticks). At Pali Jagdami Prasad Singh's men attacked two Dusadhs who were ploughing land, two of the men on tenants side received sword, sticks and "Jupti" injuries. At Repura the satyagrahis were assaulted by Raghubans Narain's men.

Official reports from the area show that the tenants offering Satyagrah had "shown perfect non-violence". We have already noted in Chapter IV an incident narrated by Swami Sahanand Saraswati as to how tenants were non-violent.

Strategy of Kisans During the Struggle

The strategy of the Kisan Sabha is clear from their

minimum demands and their attitude. Notable features were that in their struggle they wanted to neutralise the petty landlords by not interfering with their land and roped in the poorest classes as is evident from the names of the agitators who fell victims to the landlord attack. An official report also confirmed this view. The Collector of Monghyr while writing to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar said "the Satyagraha was mostly carried out by Dhanuks and a few Dharis". We have already noted that these two castes formed both occupancy and non-occupancy tenants. Apart from these, women were also being brought into action. The nature of demands were general and did not relate to specific plots. The immediate demands of the tenants were: (1) That big zamindars having hundreds of bighas land should settle a considerable portion of these lands (mainly bakasht) with the neighbouring tenants either on Batal or on reasonable cash rent. The tenants should not be ousted from those lands without any fault on their part such as non-payment of dues etc. (2) There should be a Panchayat Board to deal with such cases. (3) The tenants did not like to interfere with small landlords having a few bighas of land; and (4) There were many landlords who had got sufficient lands in other parts of the Tal area and yet were persisting to take back the lands which fell in the area of the Tal.

The attitude of the kisans was explained thus: they were pledged to keep their struggle non-violent; to help the authorities in maintaining peace except in cases where the authorities

47 Letter of Collector of Monghyr, dated October 27, 1938 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, ibid.
were not properly discharging its functions or helping the landlords.

**Attitude of the Government: Arbitration**

During this period the Government asked the Collector of Monghyr to form a conciliation committee. The latter called a meeting of the Zamindars on October 16, 1938. He invited Karyanand Sharma also to that meeting. The meeting was held at the Collector's bungalow on October 16 and 17, 1938. It was attended by the following: Badri Narain Singh, Shyam Kishore Prasad Singh, Ramasray Prasad Singh, Kamleshwari Prasad Singh, Sarobar Saran Singh, Harikant Prasad Singh, Harbans Narain Singh, Ramballabh Jagnani, Mansukh Rai Khema, Chandrabhan Prasad Singh, Kedar Nath Singh, Bisheswar Prasad Singh, Rai Bahadur Devanandan Prasad Singh (landlord), Kamdhari Singh (only 16th) (all landlords), Rambrisk Singh (Manager of Mangni Babu), the Collector, the Sadr Subdivisional Officer, the Superintendent of Police, Mirapad Mukherjee, Anand Kumar Singh, Karyanand Sharma, Jamuna Prasad Singh and Balram Singh.

The meeting unanimously decided that a committee of five persons be formed which would wait upon the tenants and settle the differences between them in accordance with the terms fixed by Prasad Award. Following members were elected to this Committee. Ramasray Prasad Singh, and Kamleshwari Prasad Singh representing the Zamindars, Mahant Sia Ram Das, President of the

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48 Letter of Karyanand Sharma to the S.D.O. of Monghyr, dated Lakhisarai October 15, 1938, ibid.
District Kisan Sabha, Chandkeshwar Prasad representing the tenants and Land Kumar Singh, Secretary District Congress Committee, Monghyr, representing the Congress.

This Committee met for the first time on the twenty-fifth October. In the meanwhile the attacks of the Zamindars and as a reaction the agitations of the kisans intensified. In its first meeting the Committee could do very little work. In fact it started wrangling about the terms of reference and other details of the Committee. According to the official report the attitude of Mahant Sia Ram, the kisan representative was "very reasonable". On October 27, 1938 the Committee decided to get some "chhita" lands at Mahramchak and the "Parti" lands at Akarpur cultivated by the Committee. Maleshwari Frasad Sinha, a member of this Committee (on behalf of the landlords) went to consult his co-sharers and later informed the Committee that the Zamindars were not ready to include Akarpur within the terms of the compromise. S.N. Pandey, Deputy Magistrate referred the matter to Rajendra Prasad who informed the Committee through the Secretary of the District Congress Committee (member of the Committee) that Akarpur should be included in the compromise. At this stage the representatives of the Zamindars informed the Committee of their inability to abide by the decisions of the Committee.

49 Letter of Collector, Monghyr dated 27th October 1938 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, ibid.

Police Arrangements

The Magistrate had also posted thirty men of Mounted Military Police and twenty-four men of Armed Reserved Police, besides a good number of ordinary police force under the charge of S.K. Pandey, Deputy Magistrate. The sowing season was over and most of the lands were sown, official opinion was that the Mounted Military Police was no longer required and that it was withdrawn since the immediate trouble was over. The police arrangements were not necessary because the immediate occasion of trouble - sowing season - was over.

However, the Collector of Monghyr felt "the question of permanent solution of the problem in the Tal area still remained". This being the problem of occupancy rights of the tenants. The actual events soon after this letter confirmed the opinion. Soon there were distraint cases in the district. Raja Raghunandan Prasad Singh of Monghyr instituted about a dozen cases for distraint of crops for realising the rents from his tenants under the unamended Tenancy Act. The Collector informed the Government that the "relations between the landlords and the tenants are steadily getting worse". He suggested "that the time has now come when Government should tackle the problem in the Barahiya Tal by legislation. The threat of legislation may compel the landlords to make terms with the

51 Letter of Collector of Monghyr dated 27th October 1938 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, op. cit.

52 Distraint Cases in Monghyr District, The Searchlight, November 26, 1938.
tenants. Failing this, however, legislation appears to be the only remedy". This was to be done on the basis of Prasad Award with suitable modifications. He further expressed the need of an "immediate revision of survey and settlement of the Tal area". In the meantime he requested for "the posting of additional police at Burhee...."

It was decided by the Government that special legislation would be "impracticable". The Prime Minister undertook to "discuss the situation with the parties and considered that the best solution would be to have a special settlement and a new record of rights prepared on the basis of actual possession".

About eight persons representing the landlords of Barahiya Tal, a few representatives of the tenants and Messrs. Shyam Prasad Singh, Ram Kumar Singh and Mahant Sia Ram Das of the Arbitration Committee, had a discussion with the Prime Minister on November 16, 1938 in connection with dispute over bakasht lands. In another meeting held on November 30, 1938 a committee of three was appointed: - Messrs. Shyam Prasad Singh, Ramcharitra Singh, M.L.A. and Ramdhari Singh - to enquire into the dispute. These efforts failed.

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53 Letter of Collector of Monghyr dated October 27, 1938 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, op. cit.
54 Proceedings of the Meeting of Council of Ministers held on November 7, 1938, ibid.
55 "Barahiya Tal Troubles Claim", The Searchlight, November 18, 1938.
56 "Barahiya Tal Dispute", ibid., December, 1938.
57 "Kisan Unrest in Bihar", op. cit.
Kisan Procession

On the Kisan front the Kisan Sabha had formed a committee consisting of Karyanand Sharma, Lakshmi Narayan, Shiv Shanker Sahay, Brahmdeo Narayan Sinha, Prabhudas to carry on the Satyagrah by taking out processions in batches to places where the processionists were assaulted by the Zamindars on November 9 and cases instituted against them. It was decided to take out a procession at Barahiya village on November 25 but was postponed till November 29 owing to Id Festivities. The procession was fifteen thousand strong and passed through Barahiya village peacefully. The procession was in protest against the assault by Zamindars on a jatha (group) of kisans going to attend the 6th session of the Longhyr District Kisan Conference on November 19, 1938. At the head of the procession was Karyanand Sharma, who was to preside over the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha Conference held at Waini (Darbhanga) on December 3 and 4, 1938. All the Congress workers of the district including Ramdhari Singh, Rand Kumar Sinha, President and Secretary of District Congress Committee respectively accompanied the procession. The procession terminated near the Post Office ground and turned itself into a large public meeting. The meeting was addressed by Karyanand Sharma and the two Congress leaders.

58 "Satyagrah by Longhyr Kisans", The Indian Nation, November 22, 1938.

59 "Kisan Satyagrah at Burhee", The Indian Nation, November 26, 1938.

60 "Kisan Procession in Barahiya", Searchlight, December 2, 1938.
1939: Bakasht Struggle

By the time of the ensuing rabi harvest season the kisans and the Zamindars were all set for "battle royal" at Barahiya Tal. The Zamindars had employed about sixty lathials (men bearing sticks) from diara areas to guard the standing crops. It was expected that the Kisans would offer Satyagrah "on a far more extensive scale than before". The events that followed proved the official assessment that the Satyagrah would be unprecedented. The reasons for the same were (a) Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha had assumed direct leadership of the struggle, (b) the Zamindars had decided to take law in their own hands and (c) the attitude of the Government had become lenient towards the Zamindars.

Zamindar's Offensive

In a letter to the Magistrate of Monghyr dated December 31, 1938 Karyanand Sharma informed him of the "big offensive" of the Zamindars. The latter were "instituting" lathials in large number who were "vexing and abusing the tenants and their women". The attitude of the police was also pro-Zamindar. Karyanand gave an example of this from Sadikpur (Police Station Barbigha) where in front of the Police Force, the Zamindar collected 300 men and harvested the paddy crop (which were really sown by the tenants in nilami lands) and assaulted the kisan

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61 Letter of Collector of Monghyr dated 4th January 1939 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 29(11)/1939.
volunteers, who were only four in number. He wanted that the attitude of the Police should not be 'partial'.

Kisans' Preparations

On December 31 a large kisan sabha meeting was held in Barahiya Tal attended, according to official estimates, by 1500 kisans including one hundred women from the villages of Lakhisarai and Sheikhpura. Prominent among those present were the following: Karyanand Sharma, Panchanan Sharma, Chunkeshwar Prasad, Ram Ralhya Singh, Baisano Dass, Ram Saran Singh and Sridhar Prasad Singh. In his speech here Karyanand Sharma compared the situation in the Tal area with that in Russia and France, where he said the kisans achieved their objective by revolution.

This was an important meeting. Preparations for the coming struggle were made. Karyanand advised the preparation of a list of kisans who were ready to die and go to jail; he stated that a kisan volunteer corps will be started at Lakhisarai and training would be given to them. He told the meeting that the kisans did not expect any benefit from the Arbitration Committee consisting of Namdhari Singh and Ram Charitar Singh appointed by the Prime Minister. Panchanan Sharma in his speech exorted the kisans to unitedly carry on the Satyagrah.

Aggressiveness of the Landlords

The Superintendent of Police reported that a day earlier


63 Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Monghyr, dated 8th January 1939, ibid.
to this meeting the Zamindars had met at the house of Badri Narayan Singh and decided to "deal with any opposition by force" i.e. they intended to take the law in their own hands.

Training Camp at Lakhisarai

On January 5 the training camp at Lakhisarai was inaugurated by Karyanand Sharma. Anil Mitra was appointed to give the training and leaders like Swami Sahajanand, Jay Prakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva were expected to visit the area. It was reported that Swami Sahajanand had asked Panchanan Sharma to remain at Mahramchak centre and to instruct the kisans to take whatever crops they required for their daily use from the disputed area. Sahajanand had offered to start the Satyagrah himself in case the landlords obstructed them.

Arbitration Board

From the very start the Collector called a meeting of "Burhee landlords", prominent Congress workers and kisan representatives on January 21, 1939. Namdhari Singh, Land Kumar Singh, Mirapada Mukherjee and Shyam Prasad Singh represented the local Congress workers, while Karyanand Sharma represented the kisans. Rai Bahadur Devanandan Prasad Singh and a number of prominent Zamindars were also present. The meeting came to the conclusion that a new arbitration board should be appointed to settle all disputes between the Zamindars and kisans and bring about peace in the Tal area. The members of the Arbitration Board were to be: Nam Kumar Singh, Shyam Prasad Singh, Sarjug Prasad Singh, Vice-Chairman Begusarai Local Board, Bachcha Babu
of Kokameh and Chunkeshwar Prasad Singh of Sheikhpura. It aimed at working out a solution on the Prasad Award, which according to the Kisan Sabha had become obsolete in the wake of developments in Barahiya Tal. In a meeting held on February 19, 1939 at village Batora, Karyanand Sharma said that the Award had been given in very adverse circumstances when the Congress was not in power. He said the zamindars were now taking shelter behind the Award to attack the tenants. The Committee adopted the policy of settling individual cases instead of looking at the problem of Barahiya Tal in general. Even in this situation it failed to provide relief to tenants who had come to it with complaints, as was alleged by Karyanand Sharma and acknowledged by the Collector of Monghyr in their meeting on March 1, 1937 at the Collector's Office. The Arbitration Committee had commenced its sittings from February 6, 1939 at Pali, where the local authorities had also camped. The Government had sent mounted Military Police and Armed Reserve Police under S.N. Pandey to supervise the work of harvesting.

Collective Demands of Raiyats

From the very beginning the attitude of the Committee was unhelpful from the standpoint of Kisan Sabha which looked at the

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64 Letter of Collector, Monghyr, dated 23rd-24th January 1939 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, ibid.

65 Sub-Inspector's Notes on Kisan Meeting held on February 19, 1939 at village Batora, ibid.

problem from a different angle. The tenants filed stereotyped petitions in each village stating that they could not put forward individual claims. In the absence of documents and knowledge of the law, it was not possible for them to assert their claims. In such an event the awards would have gone in favour of the Zamindars who were adept in manoeuvering documents. The following incidents can prove the point. On February 14, 1939 a Zamindar Ramasray Prasad Singh met his tenant at the camp of the Arbitration Committee; in accordance with the wishes of the Committee he agreed at individual settlement with his tenant by agreeing to give him five bighas of land. The snag, however, came when the plots were to be mentioned. According to the Prasad Award no definite plot was necessary to be mentioned. So the Zamindar refused to mention the same. According to official report "Ramasray Prasad was adamant and would not agree to mention any particular plot to be settled with any tenant". Thus the Award was against the interests of tenants whose occupancy rights were in dispute. The tenants, therefore, made "collective demands" showing the total area in each village which they claimed to be "Raiyati". The distribution of this total area was left to the tenants themselves. The applications filed till February 11 and 12 showed that the tenants claimed roughly 8,500 bighas out of a total of about 13,000 bighas in the villages.

67 A Brief Narration of the day-to-day Events at Barahiya tal from February 12 to 16, 1939, ibid.

68 Letter of the Collector of Longhyr dated 11th-12th February 1939 to Russell, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, ibid.
Here was a new turn in the movement, the Collector described this demand of the tenants as communistic. This demand went against the intentions of the Arbitration Committee which was prepared to look into individual claims only.

Consequently the Kisans did not appear before the Arbitration Committee and moved about in the Tal area and harvested whatever crop they could before the police or the landlords could intervene. On the other hand the Arbitration Committee was getting the disputed lands harvested under police supervision with outside help and men of the Zamindars. The Arbitration Committee and the Police worked conjointly. The authorities were attaching standing crops for recovering rents and prevented the tenants from harvesting them. The tenants naturally were starving.

Terrorism of Zamindars

Apart from this the Zamindars were mounting daily attacks and the whole area of Barahiya Tal was full of Zamindar terror. On January 26, 1939 two kisans Mural Nahton and Munshi Nahton of Kawarpur were injured by the men of Zamindars. According to a report of January 27, 1939 Zamindars attacked kisan travellers. The crops sown by the kisans were looted by the men of the Zamindars. On January 28, 1939 the men of the Zamindars had been posted in the Tal area to harass the Tal women by standing in those fields which were used from time immemorial for latrine

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Agrarian Situation in the Barahiya Tal area, ibid.
ground. This forced the hands of the kisans to launch a more intensified struggle.

Meetings to Mobilise Kisan Workers

Karyanand Sharma was making further preparations to meet this situation. The 25 men under training at Lakhisarai camp were sent to the kisan satyagrah camp at Moharram Chak in the Tal area along with Anil Mitra to mobilise the workers.

During the last week of January two meetings were held at village Repura and Moharramchak. The Repura meeting, according to official estimates, attracted 1000 kisans including 200 women. This meeting was addressed by Karyanand Sharma, Rahul Sankritayan and Panchanan Sharma. In this meeting value of Satyagrah was conveyed to the audience and women were asked to follow the men in their struggle. At Moharramchak same themes were repeated. In a statement Karyanand Sharma said "Lathials of the zamindars attacked the kisans and kisan workers at Repura on February 2, 1939. The lathials collected on the roads coming out of the village and compelled the villagers not to leave it.

"Finding no alternative the inhabitants including men, women and children in a body got out of the village to cut grass as fodder for their cattle. They came back empty handed. They were attacked by the lathials. Twenty-four kisan volunteers and four women were assaulted with lathis. The condition of the

mother of Amrit Mahaton was said to be serious. Manulal's head was fractured. Ram Sarup Sharma, incharge of the volunteer camp, rushed to the scene and he was attacked. He received three lathi blows."

**Active Satyagrah**

Under these circumstances the raiyats thought of launching "active satyagrah". In his letter from Pali Kisan camp dated February 15, 1939 to R.R. Ghosh, Karyanand Sharma alleged that "the authorities were distinctly helping the landlords" which emboldened the latter to take away crops from disputed lands and the occupancy lands of the tenants were also under "Tanaza" dispute. The tenants were starving and had no fodder even for animals. Therefore, he informed the authorities "...the kisans have lost all confidence in the authority" and "they are seriously thinking to launch active Satyagrah". On February 16, 1939 Karyanand Sharma informed the authorities that the Kisans "have started Satyagrah and have left their houses with their belongings and cattle". According to the report of the S.D.O. "a petition was also sent...by some Satyagrahis demanding land, food...." On 16th situation became tense around the Pali camp at Parmeshwari Asthan, when the lathials of the Zamindars

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75 Ibid.

76 Letter of R.R. Ghosh, S.D.O. to the Collector of Monghyr, Ibid.
attacked some kisan women satyagrahis.

Meeting of Kisans and Zamindar's Provocation

The tenants contemplated to hold a meeting on February 19, 1939. On the 18th a band of twenty kisan workers and about one hundred and fifty women went round the villages to keep up the morale of the kisans. The meeting was held at a place near Batora village. Swami Sahajanand attended this meeting. Kisans from surrounding villages came to the meeting led by red shirt volunteers. At the time of this meeting the Zamindars also arranged a meeting. The Zamindars marched past the meeting of the kisans in a procession. This caused a commotion. On the basis of official evidence it can be concluded that the officials did not make any attempt to prevent this provocation though they had made arrangements to prevent violent incidents. This meeting of the Zamindars was a "tame affair" according to official opinion. In this meeting resolutions were passed against the tenants and against Karyanand Sharma. It appealed to the Government for the protection of life and property of the Zamindars.

The meeting of the kisans was attended by about 2500 people, as reported by the police. Among those who attended the meeting were Messrs. Shyam Nandan Singh, Abdesh Karayan Singh and Mahant Sia Ram Das. The meeting was addressed among others by Swami Sahajanand who asked the kisans to follow the lead given by Karyanand Sharma.

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
Kisans March to the Collector's House

Soon after this the kisans organized a march on Monghyr to the house of the Collector. The S.D.O. reported from camp Pali "that the tenants of Mohramchak, Khotwa and Adarpur started on the night of the 27th for Monghyr with their women and cattle...and sit dharna until they are fed and their demands are met...." They reached the place by March 3, 1939. The Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar advised the Collector "to listen to all they have to say..." and then "arrange to send them back to their villages by motor bus or lorry".

Collector's Agreement with Kisan Demands Regarding Occupancy Rights

A kisan sub-leader Nawal Kishore Dharwal led about three hundred kisans to Monghyr. As a result of this pressure on the authorities a meeting took place between the Collector, Jay Prakash Narayan and Karyanand Sharma on March 2, 1939. The result of the meeting was that the authorities agreed to some of the conditions of Karyanand Sharma, who in turn promised to cooperate with the Arbitration Committee. The Collector agreed that "...there was no objection to Pandit Karyanand Sharma

79 Letter of G.R. Gokhale, Collector, Monghyr to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, dated 1st March 1939, ibid.

80 Letter of Russells to G.R. Gokhale, dated 4th March 1939, ibid.

81 C.I.D. Report to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar, ibid.
appearing before the Arbitration Committee on behalf of the tenants." This was a recognition of Karyanand Sharma as the leader of the kisans. It was also agreed that those tenants who gave evidence before the Committee were not to be terrorised by the landlords. It was also agreed by the Collector that the Award would specify the area and plots settled with the raiyats. Again this meant the authorities were going beyond the provision of the Prasad Award which did not provide for this. This amounted to recognising the demand of the kisans regarding accrual of occupancy rights on disputed bakasht lands and crossing the limits of the Prasad Award. The meeting also decided to divide the harvested crop among the zamindars and the raiyats. Pending the division of the crop the authorities agreed to help the starving kisans to either give "takavi loans" or make "small grants from the court charity fund..." depending on the merits of individual cases. Finally, the Collector agreed to recommend to the Government "a revision of Survey" in the villages concerned. From the point of view of the raiyats this meeting was a success for Karyanand Sharma, who was able to make the authorities commit on the question of occupancy rights of the raiyats, recognise the right of collective bargain and recommend the revisional survey which would recognise the rights of the raiyats, apart from providing them with interim relief. The last provision would have filled the gap left by the permanent

82 Note on Discussion with Jay Prakash Narayan and Karyanand Sharma on March 2, 1939, ibid.
83 Ibid.
settlement that of recognising fixity of tenure.

The Collector, after meeting Krishna Ballabh Sahay, Parliamentary Secretary gave "...necessary instructions to the Committee". The Sadr Subdivisional Officer informed the Collector that "the members of the Arbitration Committee noticed a marked change in the behaviour of Karyanand Sharma..." who was "wholeheartedly offering his cooperation, cracking jokes and behaving in a pleasant manner".

Retaliation by the Zamindars

The Zamindars retaliated on March 18, 1939 and presented a set of demands which negated the position of the kisans, who were demanding occupancy rights. The "Haves" took shelter under the Rajendra Prasad Award. They demanded "the Arbitration Committee will decide disputes strictly in accordance with the terms of the Rajendra Prasad Award.

(ii) The Committee will refrain from mentioning actual plot numbers of lands given to the tenants, only areas should be mentioned and the Zamindars left free to change the land from year to year so as to prevent the accrual of occupancy rights.

(iii) The Committee's award will be kept confidential and not disclosed to local officials, following a similar provision in Rajendra Prasad's Award.

(iv) The Committee will guarantee that the tenants will not create any trouble whatsoever in future and will resume

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84 Letter of Collector dated 5th March 1939 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, ibid.
normal relations with the Zamindars."

Briefly, the demands of the Zamindars meant: that the tenants should not be given occupancy rights. They wanted that whatever settlement was made should not be recognised by local authorities. This demand went against any future revisional survey. Finally they wanted an assurance from the raiyats that the latter would not agitate for their demands in future.

According to the official opinion these demands led to an "impasse". These demands went against the understanding between the Collector and Karyanand Sharma.

Zamindars' Refusal to Appear Before Arbitration Committee

These demands of the Zamindars were followed by unilateral action of the Zamindars of Repura and Chintamanchak. On April 3, 1939 the two Zamindars, Raghubans Harayan Sinha and Bindeshwari Prasad Sinha had challenged the existence of Arbitration Committee in writing and had refused to come before the Committee. The two Zamindars afterwards started forcible threshing of the disputed crop. On April 9 about one hundred and fifty kisans including women and children rushed towards Bindeshwari Prasad Sinha's Khalihan. They were attacked by lathials, who beat kisans mercilessly. On April 10, there

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85 Letter of Collector of Kongoiyr dated 21st March 1939 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 Report by the S.D.U. at Camp Pali, Barahiya dated 10th April 1939 to Gokhale, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 29(II)/1939.
was trouble at the lands of Kapildeo Narayan Singh. Karyanand Sharma informed the S.D.O. that since the Zamindars were removing the crops and the police was marking time the "tenants will start satyagrah today, 4 P.M...."

Kisan Satyagrah

The tenants of Repura suffered the most. The kisans, men and women faced the lathials valiantly. Their courage surprised the leaders. They however failed to get any land.

The Government issued prohibitory orders under Section 144 Cr. P.C. and the Zamindars instituted cases against the tenants. The Zamindars defied 144 Cr. P.C. orders in the presence of Police Officers and Armed Reserve Police. The terrorism of landlords and the lukewarm policy of the Government towards them attracted the attention of All India Leaders of Socialist and Communist persuasion.

Visit of All India Leaders

As is indicated from an intercepted letter of Karyanand Sharma to Ram Brishk Benipuri, Editor of "Janata", leaders like Indulal Yagnik, Muzzafar Ahmed, P.C. Joshi, Bankim Mukherjee, Abdul Hayat, Abdul Rasul, Jay Prakash Narayan and others

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88 Letter of Karyanand Sharma, Repura, dated 10th April 1939 to R.R. Ghosh, ibid.


90 Cases Arising out of Kisan Satyagrah at Barahiya Tal, Monghyr, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 29(II)/1939.
decided to visit the Tal area on April 12, 1939. However, on April 11, 1939 Yagnik, Bukhari and Abdul Rasul along with Karyanand Sharma visited Tal area and Repura.

**Government Allows Zamindars' Threshing of Crops**

Thus the tenants were busy in the Satyagrah and harvesting (wherever possible). They could not appear before the Arbitration Committee which conducted its enquiries for ten days during March 31, 1939 to April 10, 1939, in the absence of the Kisan representatives. Hence in the beginning the Committee was unwilling to give its decision. At the intervention of Finance Minister they agreed to give the Award. In the meantime on the representation of the Zamindars, it was decided in the presence of Krishna Ballabh Sahay on April 26, 1939 the Zamindars should be allowed the threshing of attached "boghas" in the Government Khalihans.

**Kisan Demonstration at the Monghyr Fort**

On the kisan front in the wake of the above situation Karyanand Sharma sent an ultimatum to the Prime Minister and to the local authorities that unless steps were taken to help

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91 Intercepted Letter of Karyanand Sharma, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 29(II)/1939.


93 Letter of the Collector, Monghyr dated 15th April 1939 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), file No. 29(II)/1939.

the starving kisans of the Tal area he would lead the kisans to Monghyr and by offering Satyagrah stop all working of the courts from May 2, 1939.

Celebrations of May Day

On May 1 Karyanand Sharma celebrated "May Day" in the Lakhisarai Ashram where large numbers of kisans and red shirt volunteers had gathered from Barahiya Tal and other areas.

Movements Towards Monghyr Fort

Under Karyanand Sharma's instructions and guidance a batch of 147 kisans of the area headed by Anil Mitra (a Communist student leader) boarded the Gaya Passenger train at Lakhisarai station without tickets in order to demonstrate at the fort. The batch was prepared to go to the jails. The fort gates were closed and the demonstrators had to spend the night at the Monghyr station. The next day Binod Bihari Mukherjee, Secretary of the Monghyr District Students Federation, joined Anil Mitra. They decided to split the kisans into parties and also try the Eastern gate (of the fort) which faced the main market. They struggled with the police. Failing to enter the fort they returned to a Goenka Dharamshala at the outskirts of

95 Ibid.

96 Letter of Collector of Monghyr dated 4th May 1939 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, ibid., File No. 29(V)/1939.

97 Copy of Report dated 2nd May 1939 from Superintendent of Police, Monghyr, ibid.
the city. Anil Mitra telegraphically apprised Karyanand Sharma of the situation. At about 7 P.M. the news reached Monghyr that a further batch of 108 kisans including about 40 children and women headed by Karyanand Sharma had held up the Gaya Passenger train outside Lakhisarai Station by lying on the railway lines and boarded it. They reached the Dharamshala mentioned above. The next morning Karyanand Sharma along with his wife and Binod Bihari Mukherjee led a procession consisting of all the kisans shouting slogans. On their return to the Dharamshala at 9.30 A.M. Karyanand Sharma and Medini Prasad were arrested u/s 128/112 Railway Act, and was despatched to Bhagalpur Jail. In Jail he went on hunger strike following the example of Rahul Sanskritayan to get political status for arrested kisan workers. Rahul Sanskritayan had been violently assaulted earlier while offering Satyagrah at Chapra (Siwan) and lodged in jail. In the jail he had started hunger strike.

Anil Mitra, Binod Bihari Mukherjee, Sheo Shankar Sahay and some other kisan leaders chalked out a plan of action as advised by Karyanand Sharma at the time of his arrest. It was decided to hold a meeting on the Ram Lila Maidan on May 3, 1939 and to divide the entire party of the kisans into three parts, one to do Satyagrah at the Eastern Fort gate, one to remain at Dharamshala for rest, and the third batch to lie on the rails at Purabsarai Railway Station (Monghyr town) so as to be arrested on the same charges as those against Karyanand Sharma. Anil

98 Ibid.

99 Copy of the Report dated 3rd May 1939 from the Superintendent of Police, Monghyr, ibid.
Mitra corresponded with Sahajanand, Jay Prakash Narayan, Provincial Kisan Council and sent reports to newspapers.

Meeting at Tilak Maidan

In the meeting at the Tilak Maidan, Anil Mitra attacked the government and the zamindars for having combined to commit atrocities on the kisans and chalked out the course of action. As a result of the actions mentioned above, Anil Mitra was arrested and deported to Bhagalpur Jail. The rest of the kisans were sent back through roads. The police had also succeeded in preventing another batch of kisans from boarding the 56 Down train which they had stopped near the signal of Kiul district. This batch approached Monghyr town by road walking for miles together. Those who stopped this train were 7 men, 18 women and five children. Cases were instituted under the Railway Act against Mahato and Amrit Sao Kandu of Pali, Police Station Lakhsarai and they were arrested. Police arrangements were made at all stations between Kiul and Jamalpur and Monghyr Station.

Police arrangements did not deter the kisans who had decided to come to the Monghyr town in batches like wave after wave. About 50 kisans including women under the leadership of Singhswar Sharma, nephew of Karyanand Sharma collected at Kiul Station to board the train but seeing the police they took to Surajgarh and proceeded towards Monghyr. At Dapra Kala, another

100 Ibid.

101 Copy of the Report dated 4th May 1939 from the Superintendent of Police, ibid.

102 Ibid.
batch of 100 kisans was prevented from approaching Monghyr.

At the same place another batch of fifty was stopped but their leader Panchanan Sharma was arrested under Section 151 I.P.C. Panchanan Sharma was arrested because he had decided to organize 'prabhat pheris' in the town in order to create public opinion.

**Arrest of District Kisan Leadership and Suspension of the Struggle**

The attitude of the Government was uncompromising and it arrested the entire district leadership of the struggle. However, in the absence of the leadership kisans displayed remarkable confidence in the former. This became evident a little latter at the time when the Government ordered division of crops.

Immediately Swami Sahajanand visited the Monghyr town along with Gaya Sharan Singh, a member of the Arbitration Committee, as was advised by Karyanand Sharma. Swami Sahajanand met Karyanand Sharma in jail and then addressed a meeting in Monghyr town on May 6, 1939. He persuaded the kisans to go back to the Tal area and suspended the agitation. Swami Sahajanand gave his reasons for suspending the agitation in a statement.

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103 Copy of the Report dated 5th May 1939 of the Superintendent of Police, Monghyr, ibid.
104 Copy of the Report dated 6th May 1939 of the Superintendent of Police, Monghyr, ibid.
105 Letter of Karyanand Sharma dated 3rd May 1939 to Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, ibid.
He said that the Government was providing some work to the famishing kisans in their own village, and the question of chowkidari tax was receiving the earnest attention of the Government and the assurances given by Mirapad Mukherjee, M.L.A. that the Government will provide relief to the tenants.

The Collector of Monghyr had informed the Chief Secretary that the former had talks with Mirapada Mukherjee, M.L.A. and Ram Prasad (Secretary, Congress Committee). He told them that Government was considering to give some work to those who were really in distress, once the kisans go away from the town.

Award of the Arbitration Committee

In the meantime the President of the Arbitration Committee informed the authorities that the crops had to be divided as the Zamindars were getting "restive". The Collector of Monghyr informed the Chief Secretary that soon the "next problem will be the Zamindars". Swami Sahajanand and Karyanand Sharma agreed to the distribution of crops. Karyanand Sharma was to inform the kisans of the agreement, which he did. Before his word could reach the raiyats, the local officers showed undue haste and started dividing the crops. This led to trouble

108 Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 29(V)/1939.
109 Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 29(II)/1939.
110 Ibid., File No. 29(V)/1939.
because the *raiyats* (having not yet heard from their leader) opposed the division. In that event the authorities allowed the *Zamindars* to take away all the crops because they thought "Khalihans would be looted" in less than twenty-four hours.

On the letter head of All India Kisan Sabha, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati in a letter dated May 26, 1939 protested against the undue "haste" on the part of the officers, and requested that "...the kisans get without delay their shares which have been wrongly handed over to the *Zamindars* and no portion of these is taken in any form". When the *kisans* heard of the agreement they asked for their share.

The award was announced which gave occupancy rights only with regard to 800 *bighas* of land out of disputed *bakasht* land amounting to over 14000 *bighas*. It was a drop in the ocean.

The movement started by Karyanand Sharma for collective demands on behalf of *raiyats* seeking occupancy rights following the principle of collective bargain failed in that the *Arbitration Committee*, working on the basis of *Prasad Award*, settled individual cases leading to restoration of only 800 *bighas* of *bakasht* land. According to official opinion this was a great victory of the principle of Arbitration. R.R. Ghosh said, "It is at the same time a repudiation of the communist principle of collective demand which Karyanand Sharma was, from the very

111 Ibid.

112 Letter of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati to the Collector, Monghyr dated 26th May 1939, ibid.

beginning, trying to introduce and to get accepted by the Committee. Rajendra Prasad's Award stood as a rock against this demand of Karyanand Sharma. The dream of Karyanand Sharma to make Barahiya Tal the epic centre of agrarian revolution in the province has been, by the announcement of the Award, completely broken and the tenants are now gradually waking up to the realities".

The Award was given in line with the understanding of the Congress that the solution to land problem should be through a compromise. This attitude was apparent from the legislations of the Government during 1936-39. The nature of the Awards also was against the tenants, as was borne out by the last Award.

Legislation on Bakasht Lands

The remarks of the official reflect the opinion of the Government and not merely that of a bureaucrat. An indication of the attitude of the Government is available in proceedings connected with the Act which was passed on the question of restoration of bakasht land. The intention of the Government in introducing the said Bill was explained by the Prime Minister Srikrishna Sinha, who belonged to Monghyr. He said on the floor of the Bihar Legislative Assembly that the problem of bakasht was acute in Monghyr and Jaya though it was there in other districts also. He said that by the present Bill "an attempt is being made to restore those lands to the original

114 Ibid.
tenants under certain conditions. The Bill was originally objected to by Ganesh Dutt Singh on the grounds that it violated the right to property. This Act was passed on the basis of a compromise between the landlords and the Congress. Following were the provisions of the Act: (1) All lands sold between January 1929 to December 1937 were to be restored to their respective raiyats on the latter paying for such restoration an amount equal to 50 per cent of the sum for which the lands were sold and the cost necessarily incurred by the landlord in obtaining delivery of possession. (2) Such lands were not to be restored if they were settled in good faith with a third person before March 22, 1938, nor were they to be restored if they were either in the khas cultivating possession of the landlord (provided that such landlord was a petty landlord who was exempted from the payment of agricultural income tax) or had been converted by the landlord into a garden, tank or building site. (3) If the rent of a land sought to be restored was settled, commuted or enhanced after January 1, 1911, the whole of such land was liable to be restored, but if its rent was neither settled, commuted, nor enhanced after the said date, only a portion of it was liable to be restored. (4) If the area of the land in possession of the landlord and liable to be restored was less than the area which the raiyat was entitled to claim, the whole of the area in possession of the landlord and liable to be

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117 Ibid.
restored was to be restored. (5) The amount payable for restoration was, if the Collector so directed, to be paid in easy instalments which may extend over a period of five years. (6) If the raiyat failed to pay the instalments for two years in default related to the last two years of the period of paying up the instalments in arrears before he was ejected.

Commenting on the compromise Chandreshwar Prasad Sinha, M.L.A., a zamindar from Hazipur explained the compromise "...I was explaining...that the basis of settlement that we arrived at, lay in the fact that, on the one hand, we wanted to provide relief to the tenants, on the other hand, we wanted to secure the just dues of the landlords". Rajendra Prasad had felt that it were the zamindars who had given a lot of concessions to the tenants. Jamuna Karjee rightly felt that the Congress had given a lot of concessions to the landlords. According to Jamuna Prasad Sinha "...there are so many conditions laid down that only a very small portion of the bakasht land will be restored, to the tenants". This last remark of the member was borne out by the Award of Arbitration Committee at Monghyr.

119 Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, op. cit.
120 Quoted in Ibid. However, in a letter to Maharaja of Larbhanga, dated 20th April 1938 Rajendra Prasad said that apart from the Kisan Sabha, even Congressmen would also criticise him for the compromise. Rajendra Prasad, Personal Papers, Jawaharlal Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi. (microfilm)
121 Ibid., p. 3095.
122 Ibid., pp. 3111-12.
Failure of the Award

In a meeting of the Kisan Sabha, Sahajanand viewed the Award as an attempt on the part of the Government "to crush Monghyr kisan movement by creating division amongst the kisans of the Tal...by creating ill feeling amongst the kisans who will get lands and those who will not get any thing according to the terms of the Award". Swami Sahajanand had deputed Shiv Dhari Mondal, M.L.A. of Bhagalpur to enquire into the Tal area so that further action could be taken in wake of the situation created by the Award of the Arbitration Committee. This Award however established peaceful conditions for some time; but did not solve the basic problem of the occupancy raiyats, who decided to continue their struggle even during the years of Second World War. Finally in 1946 the bakasht struggle again raised its head in 1946 in Gaya and Monghyr.

Before we discuss the war years and the bakasht struggle of 1946 let us briefly highlight some aspects of the struggle suspended on May 6, 1939. It was a struggle which drew All India attention. In fact the bakasht struggle in general evoked great interest in the All India Kisan Sabha. At its meeting on March 7-8, 1939, the All India Kisan Sabha passed a resolution on Bihar struggle, where it congratulated the kisans of Reora (Gaya) for their victory and expressed its shock at the happenings in Monghyr. "It was shocked at the reign of terror and day light looting to which thousands of kisans were subjected while they were engaged in a struggle in Barahiya Tal

(Monghyr District) under the leadership of Karyanand Sharma, where hundreds of kisans, men, women and children had to flee their homes, being hounded out by landlord's goondas under the very nose of officials while the Congress ministry reigned there. It exhorted the Bihar Government to stop the terror, bring back the fleeing people and restore the kisans to their homes and lands...." It urged the Government to solve the bakasht problem not through any anti-kisan laws but by giving peaceful possession of their lands to the kisans in consultation with the Kisan Sabha and by restoring security and relief to the affected kisans". At its Gaya session the All India Kisan Sabha in 1939 passed a more comprehensive resolution. It said, "the conference offers its greetings to the brave men and courageous women who have participated and are participating in the bakasht struggle going on in and around about Reora, Barahiya Tal, Amwari, Dekuli, Raghopur, Paijune, Mural, Lagar etc. and express its satisfaction...at the direct action of the kisans". The Kisan Sabha further "disapproved" the attitude and policy of the Bihar Congress ministry towards this question, which had "provided inspiration", to the Zamindars to "perpetuate terrorism on kisans". It demanded of the Government to "forthwith devise ways and means to solve the bakasht problem, revise their policy with regard to the Zamindars, closer supervision over the activity of the police, punish those who are guilty of breach of rules or over zealousness, treat all the

124 quoted in M.A. Rasul, op. cit., p. 47.
kisan prisoners as political prisoners".

Ideaology and Consciousness

The struggle at Monghyr in 1939 reflected that the kisans of the Tal struggled for rights of occupancy over disputed bakasht lands. The demand of the tenants shifted from individual settlement to collective settlement owing to the failure of the pro-Zamindar Rajendra Prasad Award to solve tenants' problems. Though there is no indication that the raiyats thought of establishing cooperative or collective farms yet the demand as such of collective lands shows that it was an acceptance of a principle different from that of the Congress Party. It represented a thrust towards Communist consciousness. This was also indicated by the fact that during the period of struggle "May Day" was celebrated and satyagrah at Monghyr fort was launched on that day expressing solidarity with the working class.

Strategy and Tactics

If we examine the strategy and tactics of this movement our view is further strengthened. Let us take up the classes which were included in this struggle. We have already stated that in 1936 the struggle had adopted a friendly attitude towards small Zamindars. In 1939 we learn from official documents that

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125 The All India Kisan Conference, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 259/1939.

126 Letter of Collector of Monghyr dated 11/12th February 1939 to Russells, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, op. cit., File No. 28(II)/1939.
the collective demands of the kisans did not exclude the land of the petty Zamindars (who called themselves as Kashtkars), and who sided with the Zamindar offensive against the struggle in 1939. This was a definite shift from the earlier position and marked the acceptance of class approach to the problem. Secondly the masses participating in the struggle belonged to the poorest sections of the peasantry as we have already said. Therefore classwise mobilisation was of the poorest sections of the peasantry, who bore the brunt of violent attacks of the Zamindars. Socially also the mobilisation was of those castes which were lowest in the social hierarchy like the Khanuks and Chauris. Apart from this women participated in the struggle in a large number. Their participation drew favourable remarks from everywhere. The participation of women in peasant struggles added a new dimension to the consciousness imparted by the Bihar peasant movement to the kisans to fight in defence of their rights. Politically, the kisans had accepted both the Congress and the Communists. We have already shown that important Congress leaders of the district were present in some actions like the procession and mass meeting, apart from being busy with the Arbitration Committee. The Congress workers at the local level were united with the kisans. The District level Congress leaders participated in the kisan procession and mass meeting in 1938. The following incident is illustrative. On March 15 and 16, 1939, Siban Hajam, Raghunandan Hajam s/o Jitu Hajam, and Mahabir Mahton son of Rambhangu Mahto of village Kawadpur, Police State

127 Ibid.
Surajgarh, who were Congress workers, headed a jatha with national flags and drums and moved through villages of Monipur, Kawadpur, and Lanelnagar. They announced that they would boycott all those zamindars who hired labourers from outside to cut Rabi crops—a demand made by Karyanand Sharma himself. On 16th a jatha of kisans led by Congress leaders Satyadeo Prasad Singh and Rupkant Shastri moved about in Surajgarh and shouted the following slogans "Mokarari zamin Batai Karo aur Bhook Lagi Hai Roti do". They became active supporters of Sahajanand and Karyanand Sharma. At the provincial level Congress leaders were in opposition to the direct actions of Karyanand Sharma like demonstration at Monghyr in May 1939. The Bihar Government leaned towards the zamindars in 1939 with its Prasad Award, with its policy of Arbitration, policy of repression through Armed Reserve Police, which it had adopted since 1936 onwards in Monghyr. On the other hand, the presence and active role of the Communists in the direct action at Monghyr is also evident. The participation of Rahul Sankritayan and Anil Mitra indicated the presence of the Communists. The participation of Anil Mitra and Binod Bihari indicated that All India and local

128 Agrarian Trouble - Monghyr (Policy in cases w/s. 145), ibid., File No. 29/1939.

129 Statement by Shukeo Harain, Member of Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee, who said the kisans "...marched to Monghyr to put undue pressure on Government. It is...a method of torturing and putting undue pressure on Government", Indian Nation, May 14, 1939.

130 Agrarian situation in South Bihar and measures taken to deal with it, op. cit., File No. 303/1937, Cases arising out of Satyagrah in Barahiya Tal, ibid., File No. 29(II)B/1939.
student leaders also participated in this struggle. Thus class-wise the struggle revealed solidarity between the working class, students and peasantry. In the peasantry the poorest sections were mobilised. It exposed the collaborationist nature of the provincial Congress leadership on the other side.

The organization of the struggle also pointed towards class consciousness. Before actually starting the struggle in 1939 Karyanand Sharma made preparations of organizational nature. He started a training camp at Lakhisarai and asked the Communist leader Anil Mitra to give them training, trained the kisans in peacefully resisting the offensive of the zamindars, and before starting the struggle mentioned the revolutionary role of the peasants in Russian revolution apart from that in the French revolution. The form of the struggle also showed signs of mass character. The forms varied from petitioning as was done in 1936 and the beginning of 1939, mass meetings involving thousands of kisans, satyagrah on the fields of zamindars, stopping of trains, deputations, processions and demonstrations in front of the local authorities to stop normal functioning. At the same time the leaders made use of the Arbitration Committee to compel the authorities to recognise their just demands.

Thus it can be concluded that in ideology, consciousness, organization, mobilisation and forms of struggle the bakasht struggle of Monghyr during 1936-39 progressively moved towards mass politics more and more on class lines. The period between 1940 to 1947 further sharpened this mass politics on class lines in Monghyr.
Events During War Years

During the war years, in its first phase, we have seen that the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha had adopted the political positions of Socialists, Forward Blocists and Communists on the question of opposition to British Imperialism. In opposition to Forward Bloc it had given the slogan of "day-to-day struggle" to force the Congress to start immediate action. The Kisan Sabha decided to continue the bakasht struggle during this period. According to an official report there was "revival of trouble in the Barahiya Tal in Monghyr". This report mentioned that a meeting was held at Khagaria in Monghyr, where Subhash Bose, Bhardwaj, Rahul Sanskritayan and Swami Sahajanand spoke. There is no evidence to give the details of any movement during the first phase of the war. We have already seen in Chapter III that Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha leadership was arrested during this phase. In a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha in 1942 during the People's War phase it was decided to carry on political propaganda in pursuance of the decisions of 6th Congress of the All India Kisan Sabha held at Bihita. A number of meetings were held in different districts including Monghyr, among other things, for "urging the restoration of bakasht lands". Some evidence is available of meetings in Monghyr district held in November 1945. Two big Kisan conferences were held in Begusarai area of Monghyr district at

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131 Confidential Fortnightly Report on Political Events in Bihar, Government of Bihar, Political Department (Special), File No. 121/1940.

132 People's War, August 2, 1942.
Balia and Koria. These meetings were presided over by Brahm Deo, veteran Communist kisan leader of the district. Over four thousand people attended the meeting at Balia. The slogans at the meeting were "Zamindari Pratha Nash Ho", "Desh Ki Azadi Keh Liye Hind Mussalman Ek Ho". The last slogan was important because the political demand of the country was national unity for national Government made by the Congress and the Communists. Thus the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha meeting in Monghyr emphasized on communal unity, and harmony at the time when the country was charged with communal environment. Earlier during the bakasht struggle the Kisan Sabha took precautions of not disturbing religious functions that might spark off communal trouble. We saw that the kisan leaders postponed their actions owing to anxiety of the authorities to prevent any incident of communal nature.

**Communal Riots in Monghyr**

In 1946, when communal riots broke out in the district of Monghyr, particularly western part was affected by them. Also there was trouble in South-east of Monghyr. We have no documentary evidence to find out the role of the kisans in these communal riots. On the basis of oral interviews with some political leaders who were active during this period it can be said that the kisan leaders were active in the work of providing relief to troubled areas. In 1947, we have evidence, that


134 Interview with Ganga Dhar Das, Editor, *Jan Shakti* (Hindi Daily), Patna.
Karyanand Sharma while speaking at Bettiah, Champaran denounced the concept of Hindu Raj, and warned of communal conspiracy to kill Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Bakasht Struggle in 1946

Once the war was over Monghyr saw the reoccurrence of agitation on the question of bakasht land. The struggle emerged in Gaya and Shahabad also. Since August 1946 the Bihar raiyats had started reasserting their rights over bakasht lands and winning back about four thousand acres of bakasht land.

In South Monghyr bakasht actions were fought in Mahirat, Jangal bigha and Seura — and the kisans won back their rightful claims to 150 bighas of land. However, the Prime Minister ordered that all land which was being tilled by the zamindars themselves should be returned to them. With the aid of forged documents, the zamindars were able to get back 65 bighas of the land they had taken.

In village Baruna, the kisans fought under the leadership of the Communist kisan workers Ramdhari and Prakash Anandpuri. Here they planted the Red Flag on 90 bighas of bakasht land. The zamindars collected a host of goonda toughs (anti-social elements) and sent the village patwari with them to take possession of the land. However the agents of the zamindars could not face the procession of the kisans. The patwari had to be whisked away in a planquin. Thus the kisans were able to sow

135 Speeches of Karyanand Sharma, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 113(V)/1947.
paddy. The next day the Zamindar's manager came to investigate, riding on an elephant. He caught the glimpse of the Red Flag and saw that his tenants meant business. He ran off.

In village Bhadailli when the local Zamindar found that all his terrorism would not make the kisans give up their land he struck on a new device. One of his goondas was made to disappear and the police arrested all the leading kisans of the village in connection with his agent's disappearance. Quickly the Zamindar sent his men to the fields to till the land in the absence of the males. His toughs were met with a resolute band of all the village women and few men who chased them away. The kisans said "The land is Ours - We shall Till it", and began to sow maize.

On August 25, when the crop was ready the Zamindar sent a force of lathials to harvest it. But the kisans had their own plan. The kisans mobilised fellow kisans from surrounding villages. Women tied their saris in martial style and were ready to fight. Harvesting was done without interference of the Zamindars' goondas.

In Gaya the leadership was in the hands of Congressmen like Yadunandam Sharma. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati was also with him. At Shahabad it was in the hands of the Revolutionary Democrats. At Gaya the leaders, under the pressure of the Congress, accepted an Arbitration Committee headed by an English bureaucrat. The Award was weighted in favour of the Zamindars; the kisans rejected it and got ready for a new round of struggle.

137 Ibid.
this time without the above leaders.

Conclusion

The bakasht struggle in Angshyr was caused owing to exploitation, violence and repression of Zamindars, pro-landlord policy of the Congress leadership and repression of the Congress ministry in Bihar during the period of struggle.

Zamindars: Exploitation, Violence and Repression

In 1936 the memorialists had informed the Government that they would not perform "begari" for the Zamindars. The raiyats asserted their rights under the guidance of Karyanand Sharma. The Zamindars retaliated. For example in Ulao estate at Lakhisarai the Zamindars let loose their amlas (agents) on the kisans. In 1937 they did not abide by the Prasad award, which was given after the memorialists made a representation. In 1938, the Zamindars indulged in widespread violence which lead to broken heads and panic in the area. The agents of the Zamindars did not spare women of the poor tenants. These women were subjected to violent assaults with spears and sticks and indignities. In 1938 a jatha of kisan workers going to attend the Angshyr District Kisan Conference was violently attacked by the agents of the Zamindars. This led to protest procession of the kisans. In 1939 their agents looted standing crops, attacked kisan travellers and harassed kisan women and killed many kisan workers. This led to a more active Satyagraha. In face of Zamindar violence and repression the struggle was conducted on nonviolent lines (as was corroborated by official opinion).
Pro-Zamindar Policy of Congress Leadership

The Award announced by Rajendra Prasad in 1936 was pro-Zamindar. It failed to provide for rights of occupancy to the raiyats by allowing the Zamindars to refrain from giving rent receipts, and, giving them the option to settle different lands with their raiyats so that they were unable to claim continuous possession over the same lands. The Arbitration Committee set up by the Congress Government to settle disputes over bakasht lands on the basis of Rajendra Prasad Award failed to solve the problem of accrual of occupancy rights to the raiyats. It failed even to settle individual cases because of the non-co-operation of the Zamindars with the Arbitration Committee. As a result the kisans made collective demands. Since the Congress adopted pro-Zamindar attitude it failed to provide leadership to the kisan struggle in Nonghyr.

Communists in the Struggle

Though Karyanand Sharma was not in the Communist Party, he had close links with it, as is evident from his activities during the struggle. From the very beginning he was in contact with Communists like Anil Mitra and depended on him for men and money during the struggle. The latter was put in charge of the training camp set up for kisan volunteers. Finally, Karyanand Sharma joined the Communist Party and led the struggle in Nonghyr in 1946 as a Communist.

Hence a combination of all these factors led to the mili-tant struggle of peasants in Nonghyr. The struggle began by petitioning to the Government and in the wake of widespread
Camindar violence developed into meetings, processions and demonstrations. The struggle was conducted on class lines in its ideology and consciousness, and strategy and tactics.

A detailed study of the causes, course and results of the struggle. The authors in characterising this collection of facts, rather than in attempting to set out a chronological basis, and their antecedents. The growth of class consciousness was the main result. The Communist movement was born in India. The Communist movement was carried on as a whole. The struggle was carried on as a whole. It grew up in the tradition of the great revolutionary leaders. It grew up on the noble ideas of the labourers.