Chapter III

PEASANT MOVEMENT AND PEASANT PROBLEM OF BIHAR

This chapter examines the attitudes of the All India Kisan Sabha and Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha towards the problem of landlordism, rural indebtedness and rent. Their attitudes towards land eviction as it manifested in the problem over bakasht lands are given in the Chapter dealing with Bakasht struggle in Monghyr. In order to understand this normative exercise of the Peasant movement, actual actions, wherever possible, have been taken into account. These initial stages of the movement provide an important background to the concretisation of the two organizations.

The definition of the words "peasant" and "agricultural labourer" as provided by All India Kisan Sabha and Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha is given here in order to comprehend as to whom do they refer when they use these expressions.

All India Kisan Sabha and Peasant

Although the Constitution of the All India Kisan Sabha as adopted at the All India Kisan Committee meeting at Miyapur, Bihar, in July 1937 did not define a peasant or a khet mazdoor (agricultural labourer), a differentiation between the two categories is however indicated in the All India Kisan Sabha literature from the very beginning.

In the Presidential Address to the first session of All India Kisan Sabha Swami Sahajanand Saraswati described the peasants as "producers of food". Then again at the Comilla

1 M.A. Rasul, History of the All India Kisan Sabha (Calcutta, 1974), p. 5.
session of the All India Kisan Sabha, Swami Sahajanand in his Presidential Address considered that the kisans were "producers and suppliers of all articles of food and raw materials". He said (while making a distinction between peasants and agricultural labourers) that those who have lands are kisans and those bereft of it are mazdoors (agricultural labourers). Another distinguishing mark of a peasant pointed out in this Address is that "a kisan is bereft of his capital" and lived by the "usury rent of the landlord" and "is compelled to borrow usurious loans for his maintenance and cost of cultivation" and "in repaying it back he is rendered bankrupt".

On the basis of the above view it can be said that a peasant is he who

1. has some land,
2. is bereft of capital,
3. lives on usurious rent, and
4. contracts usurious loans for reproduction.

In this definition the upper most sections of the peasants do not come because they need not contract usurious loans. Therefore, Swami Sahajanand said that "The small peasants are the backbone of the Kisan Sabha". However during the early phase of its history the All India Kisan Sabha made attempts to

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3 Ibid., p. 15.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., and M.A. Rasul, op. cit., p. 29.
draw in not only the upper sections of the peasantry but also the petty landlords. At Gaya the All India Kisan Sabha adopted fraternal attitude towards them.

The Kisan Sabha warned of the attempts being made to create a wedge between the peasants and petty Zamindars. In a resolution it said "This Sabha is pained to learn that interested persons...are of late misrepresenting to the petty Zamindars that the Kisan Sabha is inimical to them and wants to dispossess them of their lands.... Therefore, this Sabha wants to warn the petty Zamindars of the dangerous consequences of their being misled by such a move and assures them that it has always regarded the petty Zamindars who depend on agriculture for their livelihood and the agricultural labourers and kisans and wants to maintain amiable relations between them and the Kisans". At the same time it warned them of any tyranny on their part and assured them that "it will consider properly and sympathetically any reasonable problem of theirs....".

In the beginning the All India Kisan Sabha viewed that it could have amicable relations with the small landlord, and considered the small peasant as its backbone.

**Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha and Peasants**

The founding constitution of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (1929) described the peasant as one whose primary source of livelihood was agriculture, and the one who was a defender of


7 "All India Kisan Conference, Gaya", *Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 217/1939*. 
peasant interests. At the time when the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha adopted the list of fundamental rights it again defined a peasant as "one whose chief aim of livelihood is agriculture" and this definition "includes present day raiyats, small landlords for whom agriculture is a necessity and the land labourers who have been allotted plots of land by their employers". This meeting gave a list of fundamental rights of the kisans. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha thus also included the upper strata of peasants in its definition just before the launching of the Bakshti struggle. It adopted fraternal attitude towards petty Zamindars.

All India Kisan Sabha and Agricultural Labourer

At the Comilla Session of the All India Kisan Sabha, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati in his Presidential Address described the agricultural labourers as "landless kisans" and considered that they were a part of the kisan movement.

At its Session at Wuya the All India Kisan Sabha passed a resolution on Agricultural Labourers. In this resolution it regarded them as "an integral section of the class of kisans".

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9 Extract from a Special Branch Inspector's Report, dated Patna, 11th June, 1934, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 101/1934.

10 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, op. cit., p. 15.

11 All India Kisan Conference, Wuya, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 259/1939; and M. A. Rasul, op. cit., pp. 58-59.
The conference called upon all *kisans sabhas* to strive their best to achieve -

(a) complete cancellation of agricultural labourers' debts.

(b) Reservation of all unoccupied but cultivable lands for their cooperative exploitation by agricultural workers.

(c) The establishment of representatives of peasants and agricultural labourers to fix minimum wages and other conditions of work.

(d) Extension of the Workmen's Compensation Act to them.

(e) A National Policy of housing and protected drinking water supply for them.

(f) Penalisation of every kind of illegal exactions, feudal serfdom and forced labour.

(g) Repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act and (either repeal or amendment of) those provisions of the Indian Penal Code which are frequently and arbitrarily invoked against them by the police.

The conference further resolved to develop "friendly contacts" with the unions of agricultural labourers wherever they existed and exhorted "both the kisans and agricultural labourers to realise the great and growing need of their united front against all the powerful vested interests which have been rushing them both for ages past and also for their fighting shoulder to shoulder against both their class enemies and their ally, British imperialists in order to wrest complete freedom from them".

At its session at Bezwada held in March 1944 the All
India Kisan Sabha appointed a Committee to go into the problems of agricultural labour. The following were members of this committee: N. Prasad Rao, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Jagjit Singh, S.U. Parulekar (Convenor), Yadunandan Sharma, the President and the General Secretary being ex-officio members. The Sub-committee was to enquire into:

1. The wages which the labourers were getting and their relations to the cost of living.
2. Other questions of living conditions like housing, etc.
3. Social oppression, and in the light of this inquiry, formulation of the general demands of agricultural labourers.

They were also to recommend to the Central Kisan Committee as to the best way in which the Kisan Sabha was to organize the agricultural labourers to secure their legitimate demands.

In 1944 All Indian Kisan Sabha directed its attention to organizing the khet mazdoors, though it had not decided on the form of their organization.

The Central Kisan Committee meeting at Bombay in September 1945 had adopted a Charter of Demands which included many of the demands connected with agricultural labourers adopted at the Gaya session of the All India Kisan Sabha.

At its session at Sikandara Rao in May 1947 the All

12 "All India Kisan Sabha, Eighth Session, Bezwada: March 1944", Organizational Reportage no. 1 of 1944-45, April 7, 1944, pp. 43-44.
13 M.A. Rasul, op. cit., p. 123.
India Kisan Sabha in its resolution on abolition of landlordism laid down "principles, which are minimum prerequisites for achieving" the objective. In these principles the following guidelines relating to agricultural labourers were there: distribution of land among agricultural labourers and minimum living wage for them. The slogan of the land to the tiller brought All India Kisan Sabha nearer the agricultural labourers.

**Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha and Agricultural Labourer**

In the (Hindi) introduction to the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha Constitution of 1936 Swami Sahajanand regarded the agricultural labourers as peasants, and, he was not interested in creating a separate organization of the agricultural labourers - a position identical with that of the All India Kisan Sabha. The manifesto of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha also aimed at preventing a strife between them and uniting them. It contained also the slogan of land to the tiller. The immediate demands of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha included the demands of the agricultural labourers like the minimum living wage for agricultural workers.

In his Presidential Address to the Third Session at Comilla in 1938 of All India Kisan Sabha, Swami Sahajanand said that the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha had fought the battles of the agricultural labourers in Bihar.

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14 Ibid., p. 148.
15 "Manifesto of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha", Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 68/1936.
16 Swami Sahajanand, _op. cit._, p. 16.
The slogan 'land to the tiller' accepted in the Manifesto of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha naturally drew the Sabha closer to the agricultural labourers. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati felt that a demarcation between the kisans and agricultural labourers is difficult to draw. In another work Swami Sahajanand thought of these as constituting the majority of the peasantry.

Thus both the All India Kisan Sabha and Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha made almost identical usage of the two expressions during the period of our study. They considered the upper strata of the peasantry as a part of the peasant movement adopting a fraternal attitude towards agricultural labourers.

All India Kisan Sabha and Abolition of Landlordism

From the very beginning All India Kisan Sabha stated its position on the problem of abolition of landlordism. At its first session in Lucknow, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati spoke in his Presidential Address against the prevalent land system and considered landlordism to be the source of all trouble. The All India Kisan Sabha, at this session, in a resolution said "All...systems of landlordism shall be abolished, and all rights over such lands be vested in the cultivators". In the resolution on agrarian conditions passed at Comilla the demand for

17 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Khet Mazdoor (in Hindi) (n.d.).
18 Ibid., Maharudra ka Mahatanday (in Hindi) (Patna, 1949).
19 M.A. Rasul, op. cit., p. 5.
20 Ibid., p. 6; and Congress Socialist, vol. I, no. 18, April 25, 1936.
"abolition of landlordism was reiterated". The resolution adopted at Comilla was reiterated at the next session of the Kisan Sabha at Gaya. During war years other issues of national and international significance assumed priority. In the Central Kisan Council meeting held at Bombay in September 1945, a Charter of Kisan demands was prepared. This Charter included the demand of "abolition of all forms of statutory landlordism".

In November 1946 the Kisan Sabha further clarified its position on this question. According to an All India Kisan Sabha document issued in 1946 "A Most Momentous Decision Has Been Taken By The Central Kisan Council which met in Calcutta from November 25 to 30, 1946. It related to the question of abolition of landlordism without compensation."

"...the main points of the council in a nut shell are:
"1. Abolition of landlordism without compensation.
"2. No eviction of the actual tiller.
"3. All land goes to the peasant in permanent ownership with right of alienation only through a state agency and with right of renting out.
"4. Maximum limit of land to be retained by an individual owner for self cultivation is 25 acres.
"5. State to pay the expropriated small landlord, who is left with no means of subsistence, an annuity

21 M.A. Rasul, op. cit., p. 34.
22 Ibid., p. 56.
23 Ibid., p. 123.
amounting to full net rental or Rs. 500.00, whichever is less, for ten years, by way of rehabilitation allowance.

"6. In place of land revenue agricultural incom-tax to be levied on income from land above a tax free minimum".

At the tenth session of the All India Kisan Sabha at Sikandra Rao in 1947, a resolution was adopted again on the same issue.

In 1946-47 the environment for abolition of landlordism was created as a result of mass militant actions of the peasants in different parts of the country like the Bakasht struggle in Bihar, Telangana struggle in Andhra Pradesh, Punnnapra-Vayalar struggles in Kerala and Tebhaga struggle in Bengal.

**Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha and Abolition of Landlordism**

As is pointed out in greater detail in the next chapter, K.P. Sinha introduced a resolution on abolition of landlordism in a meeting of *kisan sabha* in 1935 and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati had then informed the audience that the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha had not taken a definite position on the question then. The question however, was raised in Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha meetings for more than a year.

During 1934 in a number of *Kisan Sabha* meetings the demand for abolition of landlordism was raised. In a *kisan* conference

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27 See Chapter IV.
in Monghyr district, Pandit Devbrat Shastri, speaking as the Chairman of the conference said that unless the kisans were free from the stranglehold of the system of landlordism, they (the kisans) could not have real and complete progress. At the kisan conference of Patra district, Pandit Rambrishk Benipuri, speaking as the Chairman of the conference, demanded abolition of this system. The demand was raised at Muzaffarpur, Shahabad and Gaya district kisan conferences also. These conferences demanded that it should be mentioned in the fundamental rights that there should be no exploiting class between the Government and the kisans. A campaign was thus built to incorporate the demand of abolition of landlordism in the programme of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.

In 1935 the Bihar Provincial Kisan Council met to discuss this question. Majority opinion in the meeting was for adopting a resolution on abolition of landlordism. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati was opposed to it, as he admits in his autobiography. Therefore, it could not be adopted at this meeting. Before the year was out Swami Sahajanand reached the conclusion that landlordism was dangerous and that the Kisan Sabha should raise its voice against the system. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha adopted a resolution demanding abolition of landlordism in its third session at Hajipur in the district of Muzaffarpur in 1935.

28 Awadheswar Prasad Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
30 Ibid., p. 443.
31 Ibid., p. 444; and Interview with K.P. Sinha; *Report of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, November 1935 to October 1936*, Published by A.P. Sinha, 1936.
The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha could not conduct any struggle for the implementation of this important resolution. The reasons for the absence of struggle on the question are: first, in the period of study the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was engaged in issues which assumed immediate priority over the problem of abolition of landlordism. During 1936 to 1939 the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was busy in the bakasht struggles. For the next six years the issues emerging from the incidence of war preoccupied the peasant body.

Secondly, it was only in 1946 that the problem of landlordism drew active attention of kisan organizations all over India as well as in Bihar owing to partial struggles. The All India Kisan Sabha itself, as indicated earlier, paid attention to the matter in its Central Kisan Council at Calcutta in November 1946, though earlier resolutions were passed by the All India Kisan Sabha on the need of abolishing the system. The propaganda carried on against the system over the years by the All India Kisan Sabha had led to other organizations to take up this demand. The Congress adopted this demand in its Election Manifesto of 1946. Around this time the Floud Commission (officially appointed) recommended the abolition of landlordism. In 1946 thus Congress, Kisan Sabha, and, official opinion converged on the acceptance of this demand. However it was the All India Kisan Sabha which was the first to give a 'clarion call' to fight against the system. Therefore prior to this a struggle for abolition of landlordism was not launched in Bihar.

Third, the nature of political awakening of the leadership of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha during its formative years also had its bearing. During the early thirties Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and his colleagues were influenced by Gandhi's views on class relations between the landlords and the peasants. Swami Sahajanand believed during this period that the problems of peasants could be solved amicably by talking to the landlords. After conducting an inquiry into the conditions of the Gaya peasants (which was published as Gaya Ke Kisano Ki Karun Kahani) Swami Sahajanand Saraswati wrote a letter to the Raja of Amawan, who was a local landlord. On the basis of his understanding, he wrote a letter to the Raja of Suryapura, another local landlord. He believed that talking to them might help matters. His efforts at change of heart of the landlords were fruitless. With this consciousness of class amity prevalent in the leadership the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha could not have conducted a struggle against abolition of landlordism from 1929 to 1936. It was only in 1935 that the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha passed a resolution - that also when the demand was made from the district level.

Some scholars have explained the inability of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha leadership to conduct such a struggle to the caste factor. Their argument is as follows: the Zamindars of Bihar were primarily Bhumihars. The dominant leadership of
Bihar Kisan Sabha was also Bhumihar. Not only was the top leader of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati himself a Bhumihar, but during his formative years, was instrumental in the formation of Bhumihar caste association. He was the leader of this influential caste association. His close links with this community can easily be established e.g. his Ashram at Bihta was financed by the Bhumihars for imparting education to the children of Bhumihars. Therefore, it was not possible for him to allow any struggle for abolition of landlordism, which would hit the Bhumihars mainly.

The view is very cogently argued, though fails to explain the real position both of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha. It is true that Swami Sahajanand was a leader of his caste association. But this was before he became active in the Kisan movement. The Ashram at Bihta was set up in 1926-27 and not during the period of kisan movement. In fact the Ashram trained kisan volunteers and did not impart education to the children of Bhumihars for which it was originally started. He broke up this caste association with the solitary object of preventing Ganesh Dutt (a landlord) from becoming its president and exploiting his position against the Congress in the next elections to the legislative council. Ganesh Dutt represented the landlords in the council. Though Swami

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36 During my stay in Patna, I discovered that this charge was levelled by the Brahmins (who consider themselves superior to the Bhumihars). This view was hotly contested by the Bhumihars themselves in defence of Swami Sahajanand and against the landlords.

Sahajanand was friendly with Ganesh Dutt, the former got disillusioned with the latter.

Once Swami Sahajanand Saraswati joined the kisan movement he did not go to the caste association. In fact it never became active after he broke it up for the next decade. Swami Sahajanand (owing to his uncompromising attitude towards landlords) became a terror for them. Those who supported Sahajanand pointed out in personal interview that the bakasht struggles themselves were against the landlords. Therefore, Swami Sahajanand did fight the Zamindars. On balance, it is true that these struggles were against the Zamindars. These were against threatened and actual evictions of raiyats from 'bakasht' lands. These struggles did take away a lot of land from the hands of the landlords. They did not, however, aim at abolition of the system as such. These struggles could be viewed as partial struggles which among other things, resulted in creating an environment against landlordism in 1946.

It can also be said to the credit of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati that ever since he accepted the ideal of abolition of landlordism, he propagated for it consistently. In his Presidential Address at the first session of All India Kisan Sabha at Lucknow, he spoke against the system. He felt that the zamindari system was the source of all trouble and he was not prepared to compromise on it. He stuck to this view till his very last. There is evidence to show that during the first half of thirties


39 M.A. Rasul, op. cit., p. 5.
propaganda against landlordism did take place. In an official file a hand bill is contained asking the agriculturists to "offer satyagraha" to "end the zamindari system". The same file contains another leaflet asking the people to end the system. This does not negate the view that there was no province-wide struggle against the system. It does, however, signify that the caste factor was negligible in this context.

All India Kisan Sabha and Rural Indebtedness

The founding Congress of the All India Kisan Sabha took note of the problem of rural indebtedness, which made the raiyats lose their lands. At the Lucknow Congress in 1936 the All India Kisan Sabha put forward its long term perspective and immediate demands. In its list of fundamental demands the All India Kisan Sabha said "whereas the peasants have been overburdened by oppressive rural indebtedness and the usurious rates of interest, whereas the lands of most of the peasants have either passed or passing into the lands of absentee landlords, sowcars and urban-classes....

"The peasants shall be completely relieved of liability to pay their old debts or interests thereon and the state shall immediately put into operation the necessary machinery to provide agricultural credit for peasants' current needs. Pending the

40 "Handbill signed by one Bharat Shiv Shankar Bharati, Gaya Jail", Government of Bihar and Orissa, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 10/1934.

41 Extracts from Weekly Report dated 21st June 1934, from DIG, CID, ibid.

fulfilment of these fundamental demands the All India Kisan Sabha (in this very session) made an immediate demand of a 'declaration of a 5 years' moratorium for all agrarian indebtedness'. This session also stressed the need of scaling down of debts and their repayment in sixty annual and equal instalments.

The All India Kisan Committee at its meeting in Calcutta on October 27-28, 1937 again paid attention to this problem. By now Indian National Congress had formed ministries in a number of provinces. The All India Kisan Committee in this meeting asked the Congress ministries to honour their commitments of the Faizpur agrarian programme of their party. The Faizpur programme of the Congress said "the crushing burden of rural debts should be done away with. Special tribunals should be appointed to enquire into these debts, and the debts which are unconscionable or beyond the capacity of peasants to pay should be liquidated. Meanwhile moratorium should be declared and steps should be taken to provide cheap credit facilities". The Calcutta meeting of the All India Kisan Committee called upon the Congress ministries to immediately enact laws imposing moratorium on debts. The Provincial Kisan Sabhas were also asked to organize campaigns for a moratorium.

Except for the Government of Uttar Pradesh, Madras and

43 Ibid.
45 M.A. Rasul, op. cit., p. 15.
Bombay, Congress ministries went back on their Faizpur programme as far as rural indebtedness was concerned.

The All India Kisan Committee at its meeting at Delhi in September 1938 took note of the failure of the Congress ministries who had not declared moratorium. The resolution on debt relief said "The committee is shocked at the flagrant betrayal of our peasants by most of the provincial ministries by their continued failure to declare a complete moratorium on the debts of kisans and agricultural workers despite their election pledge and the most unequivocal and pressing demands for a moratorium, and requested the Congress to implement its promises." It further expressed its disappointment with the governments of the three states mentioned above for having "so far failed to provide any satisfactory machinery either for scaling down debt burdens in proportion to the fall in prices of agricultural properties or for cancellation of debts of all small holders and agricultural labourers."

Since the Congress ministries failed to move in the matter the All India Kisan Sabha in its fourth session at Gaya, in 1939, "condemned the continued failure of most of the Provincial Governments to declare a long term moratorium and to scale down agrarian debts and to afford cheap credit facilities to kisans". In its immediate demands pending cancellation of debts, the Sabha listed the following:

(1) All usufructuary mortgages of more than 12 years should be treated as redeemed.

46 Ibid., p. 46.
(2) All agricultural produce necessary for the maintenance of a kisan's family as well as his house, standing crops, necessary cattle and household utensils should be exempted from attachment in execution of civil and revenue decrees.

(3) Cheap credit should be provided to kisans at a maximum rate of 6 per cent simple interest.

(4) No imprisonment in execution of debt decrees.

(5) Principal amount of debt contracted before 1929 (when the depredations of the world economic depression began to be felt widely) should be scaled down in proportion to the fall in prices.

(6) Sale of kisans' lands for arrears of rent, revenue, or debts should be forbidden except for prices above the minimum fixed by a court in the light of the prevailing average sale value.

During the war period other issues assumed priority.

The problem of indebtedness again drew the attention of the All India Congress Committee at its meeting held at Bombay in September 1945. At this time elections to the Provincial Legislative Assemblies and Central Legislative Assembly were ensuing. The All India Kisan Committee adopted a Charter of demands which incorporated, apart from others, the demand of cancellation of debts of all cultivators with an uneconomic holding and liquidation of debts of all other cultivators.

47 Ibid., p. 57.
48 Ibid., p. 123.
Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha and 
Rural Indebtedness

The problem of peasant indebtedness in Bihar was acute. According to a Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha report prepared by Awadeshwar Prasad Sinha it was worst in comparison with other provinces. The report gave the following facts collected from official sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Debt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>501 lakhs</td>
<td>100 crores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>484 &quot;</td>
<td>124 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>465 &quot;</td>
<td>105 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>376 &quot;</td>
<td>155 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>115 &quot;</td>
<td>36 &quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the above that the population strength of Bengal and Uttar Pradesh was one and a half and one and a quarter times more respectively in comparison to Bihar. However, the debt in Bihar was one and a half times and one and a quarter times more than Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, respectively. If the debt of Bihar landlord is deleted the Bihar raiyat had to pay rupees 129 crores as debt. Bihar had a strength of 210 lakhs kisans. This meant that every kisan had to pay a debt of rupees 60. According to this report the income of the raiyat was not enough to meet his debt obligations. In fact his debt increased.

49 Awadeshwar Prasad Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
51 Ibid., p. 53.
As he contracted usurious loans it sank him into chronic indebtedness.

Commenting on the Kisan Sabha activities, an official report of 1932-33 said: "At more than one meeting resolutions were passed asking for... a moratorium in respect of the agriculturists' debts for a period of one year". In 1935 the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha took a definite position on this question, though earlier it had raised the problem. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Council in its meeting held at the residence of Babu Baldeo Sahay, Advocate, Kadamkuan Bankipur, on January 26, 1935 passed a resolution regarding this problem. It said that the Bihar Provincial Kisan Council "thinks it necessary that the Government should appoint a committee to investigate thoroughly the appalling indebtedness of the rural population with a view to devise ways and means of liquidating agricultural indebtedness".

"This Council demands that -
1. The highest rate of interest on loans to agriculturalists should be fixed by law at 6 per cent per annum;
2. In no case should compound interest be allowed in drawing up decrees or otherwise;
3. In those cases in which double the amount loaned has already been realised the debtors should be exempted by legislation from any further payments;
4. In no case more than double the amount loaned should

52 A Short Summary of the Administration of Bihar and Orissa, 1932-33 (Patna: Bihar and Orissa, 1934).
be allowed to be realised by courts in passing
decrees or otherwise;
5. It should be made possible for judgment debtors
to pay off their debts in easy instalments without
any further payment of interest".

In a mass meeting attended by 1500 people of the Kisan
Sabha at Dukhan Saraya, Police Station Paru, District Muzaffar-
pur, on January 28, 1935, a resolution was passed reiterating
the above demands. In another meeting at Monghyr held in
February 1935 the following resolution was passed: "In the
opinion of this Sabha the financial position of the kisans will
not improve unless they are relieved of the burden of the pre-
sent debt. The greater portion having already been paid as
interest, should be written off and for the realisation of the
remainder easy instalments may be fixed by making a law". In
another kisan sabha meeting held at village Jandir, Police
Station Colganj, District Bhagalpur, on February 27, 1935, Swami
Sahajanand Saraswati said: "the burden of debt was becoming un-
bearable by the kisans...they should be relieved of the burden
of debt through legislation". A resolution was also passed to
this effect.

53 Copy of Special Branch (C.I.D.) Officers' Report dated
Patna, 27th January 1935, Government of Bihar and Orissa,
Home Political Department (Special), file no. 16/1935 I;
and Awadeshwar Prasad Sinha, op. cit., pp. 33-34.
54 Report of Two C.I.D. Reporters signed Wahid Jun Khan and
etc., ibid.
55 C.I.D. Report of Kisan Sabha meeting, Rajguru Tola, Tara-
pur Gachi, District Monghyr, February 4, 1935, ibid.
56 C.I.D. Report of Kisan Sabha Meeting at Janidir, Police
Station Colgong, District Bhagalpur on February 27, 1935,
ibid.
Nothing was done on this question in the ensuing year.

In 1936 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati intended to move a resolution in the meeting of the Subjects Committee of the Lucknow Session of the Congress. The resolution drew the attention of the party towards the "insolvent state" of Bihar peasantry and "urged the congressmen to start a campaign for..." some of the immediate demands of the peasantry. Among these demands, he listed "liquidation of agricultural indebtedness and fixing up interest at 6 per cent per annum".

In 1936 the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha included this demand both in its manifesto and agrarian programme. The manifesto said: "Speaking concretely and with reference to Bihar, in order that the kisans of this province may rise from their miserable condition - from their poverty and slavery - it is necessary that ... the agrarian debt be wiped off". In its agrarian programme it demanded "cancellation by law of all previous debts and fixing of rate of interest at 6 per cent".

It can be safely said on the basis of non-availability of proof that the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha in its subsequent phases did not actively strive for this particular demand beyond general reiteration. In 1938 in a meeting of the Kisan Sabha a resolution reiterating the manifesto and the agrarian programme.

57 Awadeshwar Prasad Sinha, op. cit., p. 53.
58 "Swami Sahajanand's Resolution", Searchlight, April 5, 1936.
of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was passed.

All India Kisan Sabha and Problem of Rent

The Great Depression made the burden of rent on peasantry unbearable in India. The demand of the kisans was for rent reduction, rent remission and cancellation of arrears of rent during the first six or seven years of the thirties of the present century. The problem of arrears of rent combined with the rapacious greed of the Zamindars caused maltreatment of raiyats. Illegal exactions added to the problem. Maltreatment in executing them violated all norms of human behaviour. The rent problem led to land evictions and deprived the raiyats of the lands they held for generations.

The All India Kisan Sabha in its Charter of Minimum Demands asked for "1. Cancellation of all arrears of rent and.... 2. Abolition of all... rent from uneconomic holdings. 3. Reduction by at least 50 per cent of rent and.... 5. Grant of the right of remission of rent for all tenants of landlords wherever crops fail and to stop all resettlement operations and all kinds of enhancements of the rent.... 10 Freedom from arrest and imprisonment for inability to pay debts, rents and revenue.... 11. Immunity from attachment for all minimum holdings, stables, living quarters, household necessaries, dairy and other cattle in execution of other decrees and revenue and rent demands.... 19 stabilisation of prices of agricultural products at 1929 level...."

61 Kisan Sabha Meeting held at Neematpur Ashram, Police Station Bela, District Gaya, on September 1, 1939. Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 33(c)/1938.

Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha and the Problem of Rent

Bihar was the scene of widespread agitation on the question of rent remission, rent reduction or cancellation of rent during the thirties. The agitation was the most acute in those districts of Bihar which had the system of produce rent, i.e. bhaoli or danabandi (appraisal of standing crops). The reasons for the widespread agitation were economic and political.

Economic Factors

It is already indicated in Chapter II that rents posed a serious problem in the districts of Gaya, Patna, Monghyr and Shahabad because of the prevalence of bhaoli system. According to an official report the produce rent was responsible for "considerable friction" even during the year 1928-29, at the time when the impact of Great Depression was not felt. The commutation of rents from kind to cash during the period of high prices of agricultural products was posing problems of payment of rent even during normal times because they were high. When the fall in the prices of agricultural products came in the wake of Great Depression it became impossible for the tenants to pay the rents which were already high even according to the prices of products during normal times. Hence, there was discontent in the general mass of the kisans.

Political Factors: Role of Congress During Civil Disobedience Movement

The Congress had given a call for the Civil Disobedience

Movement in 1930. The movement had its impact in every province. According to an official report, "...there was no province in British India which had been altogether immune from the effects of the Movement, and in all...the Local Governments had at one time or another experienced considerable difficulty in dealing with the incidents to which it gave rise...."

In Bihar "during the first three months" of 1930 "the supporters of the movement were occupied with the work of organization". This report indicated that Rajendra Prasad, in a speech at Patna in March, raised the issues of abwabs and chaukdari-tax. The Congress aimed at organizing activities of the kisans to mobilise them (the kisans) for its movement. Throughout the earlier part of the thirties Congress was active amongst the kisans. It raised the most burning issue of the time, i.e. the problem of rent. A report to the Chief Secretary of Bihar dated August 25, 1931, signed illegibly, mentioned "Congress agitation against payment of rent" in Bettiah estate in the district of Champaran. In another report to Chief Secretary, it


67 In support of this view, see Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Mera Jeewan Sangharsh, Bihta (Patna, 1952); The interviews with a number of activists of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha in Bihar like K.P. Sinha and Triveni Sharma Sudharkar strengthen this view.

68 Kisan Sabha in Bihar and Orissa, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 34/1931.
was mentioned that the Congress raised the question of canal rates in Shahabad only "as a prelude to a no-rent campaign, and in accordance with the policy...of getting hold of small grievance, getting it rectified and then posing as the protectors of the raiyats and inciting them to put in further demands. This agitation may, therefore, well be a prelude to a no-rent campaign and it is to be noted that there are signs of similar agitation in Champaran district". The following account in the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent Police revealed the activities of the Congress to the same effect. "...it is obvious that the Congress workers...evince interest in their (kisans) grievances against their Zamindars as a means to draw them into the Congress fold". In another report it is alleged that the non-payment of rent was due, among others, to the Congress propaganda in Patna. In pursuance of mobilising the kisans the Provincial Congress Committee had established an inquiry committee to go into the agrarian situation of the Province, which met on August 28, 1931, at Patna to "discuss the agrarian situation". The Report of this committee could not be published owing to the Civil Disobedience Movement. Later in 1936 the Congress had again appointed another inquiry committee to examine the agrarian

69  Ibid.

70  Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, ibid.

71  Extract from a Special Branch Inspector's Report, dated Patna 9th January 1931, ibid.

72  Extract from a Special Branch Inspector's Report, dated 3rd September 1931, ibid.
situation in Bihar. The President of the committee was Rajendra Prasad, who recognized the grievances of the tenants regarding rent problem, among other things, as just. The committee visited a number of places - Jahanabad, Aurangabad, Nawada. The Chief figures were Rajendra Prasad and Sri Krishna Sinha. According to an official report "their speeches were moderate in tone and both of them appear to have been more interested in electioneering than in investigating grievances of tenants".

It can thus be concluded that the activities of the Congress in Bihar in the wake of Civil Disobedience Movement gave consciousness to the kisans and mobilised them in struggle or issues like the problem of rent. The Government considered these activities as a prelude to a non-rent campaign in the province.

Role of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha

The activities of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha during its organizational-agitational phase gave impetus to the campaign on the question of rent. According to an official report, "In Bihar, the Kisan Sabha is doing considerable work. As in the United Provinces, they want to organize peasants". As is pointed out in the subsequent chapter the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha raised the consciousness of peasants and prepared them for active struggle.

In the immediate demands the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha asked for, among other things, for fixity of rents, exemption of

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

74 Extract from a Special Branch Inspector's Report, dated Patna, 3rd September 1936, op. cit.
all uneconomic holdings from rent or taxes, stiffening of the provisions of law regarding issuing of rent receipts, cancellation of arrears of rent and reduction of rent and canal rates by 50 per cent.

A large number of *kisan sabha* meetings in the province since 1932 and in other forums paid attention to this problem. They requested the Government to cancel arrears of rent and reduce the rents by fifty per cent. Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha organized as many as nine meetings at Darbhanga, Patna division; Tirhut division apart from other places in one month from January 8, 1933 to February 8, 1933. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha in its meeting on April 21, 1934 at Patna resolved in the context of the earthquake in Bihar: the arrears and current rents of the *kisans* of the areas affected by the earthquake be remitted. In the district conference of Monghyr, the *Kisan Sabha"requested the Government that considering low price of grains and less yielding capacity of the lands, it is essential that the old rents may be reduced to half". A meeting of the Kisan Council held on July 29, 1934 at Patna expressed "its profound regret

75 Agrarian Programme for Bihar, *op. cit.*


77 Agrarian Affairs, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Home Political Department, *File No. 21/1933*.

78 Agrarian Situation and Activities of Kisan Sabha, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Home Political Department (Special), *File No. 10/1934*.

79 Ibid.
that the Local Government have not yet given any consideration to the demand of the Kisan Sabha that they should undertake revision of rent in view of the fall in prices and the consequent depression which has now become normal and regrets that they will not give their immediate attention to it". In the District Kisan Sabha Meeting of Muzaffarpur a resolution was passed requesting "the Government to make use of Section 112 of the Bengal Tenancy Act for remitting, or lessening, the revenue or rent of the petty Zamindars and the raiyats as the present rate is beyond their means owing to depression".

The Provincial Kisan Conference at Gaya held in August 1934, again requested "the Government of Bihar to make use of Section 112 of the Bengal Tenancy Act, in fixing the rate of rent according to the circumstances in the prevailing time as the existing rates of rent were quite unbearable for the tenants". Swami Sahajanand Saraswati issued a statement which said: "It should be distinctly borne to mind that nothing short of full remission of rents and other dues and postponement of execution of all sorts of money decrees at least for one year can save the kisans from utter ruin". In the district of Darbhanga, Swami Sahajanand advised the kisans not to pay rents. According

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Searchlight, March 18, 1934.
84 Extract from D.I.G.'s Report dated 21st March 1934, Government of Bihar and Orissa, File No. 33/1934, Pt. VI.
to an official report in the year 1935-36, "one important cause of friction was the high level of rents in many areas, which was accentuated by the low prices of agricultural produce...." In a Kisan Sabha meeting in Muzaffarpur in January 1935, the following resolution demanding fifty per cent reduction in rents was passed: "That due to the world wide financial depression and reduction of prices of foodstuffs the financial position of the kisans has become worst and they are not in a position to pay the present rent. Therefore, it is the duty of the Government to at once reduce it by half and remit the rent in arrears".

In a meeting at Monghyr in February 1935, it demanded reduction of rent by fifty per cent and asked for remittance of rent in arrears. According to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur "Kisan Sabha has been somewhat active during the fortnight and...its work touches the raiyat more generally. The speeches were all in the same strain, an attack on the Zamindars, a demand for reduction of rent". In December 1935 in a meeting the Bihar Provincial Kisan Committee decided to concentrate during the next three months on "Reduce the Rent Campaign". The Kisan

86 Kisan Sabha Meeting at Muzaffarpur on January 28, 1935, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 16/1935
87 Kisan Sabha Meeting at Monghyr on March 4, 1935, ibid.
movement was on the increase during 1936-37. According to an official report the Kisan Movement "gained momentum during the year. A number of meetings and conferences were held at which the grievances of the Kisans were voiced". As is apparent from this report the baksash struggle was gaining more momentum during this period, because now owing to inability of the tenants to pay the rent their lands were being sold by the landlords as was apparent in Jaya. The Government viewed such an agitation as "of dangerous nature". In Jaya, however, the Kisan Sabha during this year, urged reduction of rent, according to the report of J.R. Dain. Official reports from R.E. Swanzy, I.C.S., Commissioner, Patna said "large number of holdings have been sold up by the Makshedpur for arrears or rent, and the tenants rendered landless". In a report to Cousins, the Collector of Patna said: "A crowd of about 200 to 300 kisans of this district met me yesterday...." They stated the grievances of the raiyats as follows:

1. Rent is very high, in some cases as high as Rs.24/- per bigha.
2. Old cash rents dating back to the last survey. Many of these have been enhanced particularly in the

91 Extract from Bihar Police Abstract, June 24, 1936, Government of Bihar, Home Political Department (Special), File No. 6(a)/1936.
92 J.R. Dain, Commissioner, Bhagalpur, Report to Mr. Brett, ibid.
Amawan, Guzri, Bhimpagar, Dhara, and other estates. The enhancements which took place before the depression vary from 131 to 161 per rupee. It is claimed that the enhancements should be given up in most cases in the civil Court before the depression.

3. Regarding bhaoli rent, the landlords take too much of the crop.

4. Commutation rates under Section 40 of Bihar Tenancy Act in cases before depression are now unfair and many holdings are now being sold up due to non-payment. A number of Kisan Sabha meetings were held in Tikari estate in Gaya. There was a demonstration in the estate with the slogan "reduce the rent by half". In Monghyr a petition was submitted by raiyats asking the Government for reduction of rent. In Shahabad, a meeting of Kisan Sabha passed a resolution for reduction of rent.

**Role of the Press**

The Searchlight published an article in 1936 by Jamuna Prasad Sinha who wrote in support of the demand of the Kisans.

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94 Collector of Patna's Report to Commissioner, Patna, ibid.

95 Fortnightly Report for the period ending 11th April, 1936 to Mr. Brett, ibid.


97 Extract from notes taken by Special Branch Reporter at a Kisan Conference held on 27th and 28th March 1936, at Ekwari, District Shahabad, ibid.
that action should be taken under Section 112 of Bihar Tenancy Act to reduce the rents in Gaya. Commenting on the article the paper in its editorial said: "In a timely and well-reasoned communication, published elsewhere, Babu Jamuna Prasad Sinha of Gaya emphasizes, what we have stressed more than once, that action under Section 112 of the Bengal Tenancy Act is the only way to tackle the exceptionally grave situation in Gaya and adjoining districts" and not under Section 38 of the Act.

The Indian Nation editorially commenting on Rajendra Prasad's statement (Indian Nation, June 28, 1936) in support of rent reduction said that for their problem "an effective remedy is provided in the Bihar Tenancy Act itself which can deal with all such cases of inequitable rents" under Section 38 of the Act.

It can safely be concluded from the above evidence that -

(1) the Congress and the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha organized the kisans on the slogans of rent reduction, rent remission and cancellation of arrears of rent, though the Congress did not organize a no-rent campaign.

(2) The agitation of the kisans on this problem was the most acute during the first half of the thirties. It was widespread. Districts like Gaya, Patna, Monghyr, Shahabad, Darbhanga and Bhagalpur were involved in this agitation.

(3) By 1936 the problem receded into the background.

98 Searchlight, July 10, 1936.

99 Indian Nation, July 30, 1936.
because of the struggles of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha on the question of actual and threatened land evictions which were the result of rent problems. Therefore the rent agitation can be viewed as a prelude to the bakasht struggles.

(4) The agitation took the form of meetings, petitions and demonstrations as is indicated by official reports from Champaran, Patna and other districts.

(5) The English dailies Searchlight and Indian Nation supported the case of the kisans and Zamindars, respectively.

Intervention by Congress Ministry

Once the Congress came to hold office under the Government of India Act, 1935 it could not ignore the problem of rent for the following reasons: (1) the acuteness of the problem and (2) its own campaign on the question had roused the expectations of the raiyats. The new expectations of the raiyats were expressed in a demonstration organized by the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha on August 23, 1937 when the Assembly met the first time after the election of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker.

The Congress passed an amendment to the Bihar Tenancy Act in regard to the rent reduction apart from other things in 1937. As far as the problem of rent was concerned the new act provided for -

(1) cancellation of all enhancements between January 1911 and December 1936.

(ii) The reduction of all rents commuted between January 1911 and December 1936, in the same proportion in which the prices have gone down.

(iii) Total or partial remission of rent in cases where the soil has deteriorated by deposit of sand or submission under water or another specific cause or where the landlord has neglected the irrigation arrangements which he is bound to maintain.

(iv) Reduction of Rent where there has been a fall in the average local prices of stapple food crops (not due to a temporary cause) during the currency of the present rent.

(v) Settlement of fair rent in other suitable cases.

During the period of high prices in many cases rents were commuted into cash rents. So they were fixed very high. This was to be reduced according to current prices during the decennial period immediately preceding the commutation.

When land was lost due to diluvium, the rent was to be abated in whole or in proportion of the area so lost to the area of the whole holding. But the tenants' rights in it were to subsist and he was to be entitled to immediate possession after reformation on the same rent as was payable before diluvium.

Thus reduction was to be in cash and kind. Commuted rents were also to be reduced. It was calculated that on an average the reduction in cash rent would come to about 25 per cent reduction, being greater in cases where enhancement was higher and less where it was lower. Reduction in commuted rent, it was expected, might come to 6 annas in the rupee. In these
cases also the reduction was to vary according to the high or low rent fixed.

There was to be settlement of fair rent in other cases where rent was high. Rent so settled or reduced in any of the above ways was not liable to enhancement for fifteen years.

The Congress ministry in Bihar enacted another law on Reduction of Arrears of Rent in 1938. This act provided in the case of holdings, the rents of which had been either settled or reduced under any provision relating to the settlement or reduction of rents, no landlord shall, in any suit or proceeding be entitled to recover arrears of rent at a rate higher than the settled or reduced rents.

(b) In the case of holdings, the rents of which have not been settled or reduced as aforesaid, no landlord shall, in any suit or proceeding be entitled to recover from the raiyat any arrears of rent at a rate in excess of the rent which would have been so settled or reduced if the raiyats had made application under the relevant provisions of the law, and

(c) In cases not concerned by any of the above paragraphs the Collector may, on the raiyat's application, reduce the arrears to such an extent as he considers proper in the circumstances of the case; but before the Collector reduces the arrears he has to satisfy himself as to the bonafides of the applicant. Certain standards for testing such bonafides are given in the Act itself.

101 Ibid.
The Bihar Tenancy Amendment Act was introduced with the declared object of providing relief to the tenants. Sri Krishna Sinha, said on the floor of the Bihar Legislative Assembly "...in bringing forward this Bill Government are simply trying to give legislative effect to the demands put forth by the tenants of this province.... Since the time, Sir, economic depression set in, the entire tenantry of Bihar has been groaning under the weight of high rent". He further told the House that the Bengal Tenancy Act allowed the landlords to enhance the rents on certain definite grounds. He felt the rents had been enhanced "extra judicially and arbitrarily". He wanted that the new provisions should stop abwads, and make issuing of rent receipts necessary. He appealed to the Zamindars to cooperate with him in removing the evils encrusting the problem of rent. He assured the landlords that, it is not the "intention of the Government to trench upon their legitimate rights. I want that they should get their rent, but I also want that the tenants should feel that there is no power on the earth which will deprive them of their just earnings".

The representative-in-chief of the Zamindars, who was also the leader of the Opposition in the House, Ganesh Dutt Singh was against Section 112A which the amendment sought to introduce. This provision he alleged gave to Revenue Officers enormous powers which dealt with cancellation of enhancement,


104 Ibid., p. 1803.
about reduction of rent, about remission. In this he was supported by Saiyed Ali Manzar, who said that the Bill did not provide for safeguards to the Zamindars.

In the final stage of the Bill the representatives of the landlords agreed to the new bill because it was the product of a "compromise" between the Congress and the Zamindars which protected the right of the landlords to distraint in case of non-payment of rent. The Bihar ministry had brought about the legislation in agreement with the Zamindars. The result of the agreement was that tenants suffered, firstly, on account of land auctioned for inability to pay rent because that land was not to revert back; secondly, regarding land made into bakasht after 1929. The agreement between the Zamindars and the Congress in Bihar showed the collaborationist nature of the Congress in Bihar. This point is further discussed in the conclusion of the study.

Rent settlement operations were conducted after the elections of 1936 and it was "decided that action should be taken under Section 112, Bihar Tenancy Act, to reduce the rents of the occupancy tenants of certain areas in the interest of local welfare". These operations were later to be conducted under Section 112A after the Bihar Tenancy (Amendment) Act VII of 1937 was passed. The effect of these operations was most on the

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
occupancy raiyats because only "the rents of occupancy raiyats were reduced under Section 112. The rents of non-occupancy raiyats could not be reduced under that Section...." The effect of these operations was on "150,338 cases spread over 6,019 villages in four districts. The total amount of rents for these holdings was Rs.42,02,494 and the total amount settled comes to Rs.31,67,025. The over all percentage of reduction comes to 24.6". "The percentage of reduction for commutation cases under Section 40 is 28.6. As per new holdings, the percentage of reduction was 26 per cent". These operations temporarily satisfied the peasants.

Nature of Intervention

The Congress ministry's understanding of the State intervention on this question was determined by an urge to prevent class war between the Zamindars and the tenants on the basis of Gandhian principles. Prime Minister Sri Krishan Sinha, while speaking on the Bihar Tenancy (Amendment) Bill 1937, said that his attitude towards landlords and tenants was that of compromise. He said "I want to ask my landlord friends that it is not the intention of the Government to trench upon their legitimate rights. I want that they should get their rent, but I also want that the tenants should feel that there is no power on the earth which will deprive them of their just earnings". Defending the cause of the kisans he said in this speech, that even during Lord Cornwallis' days when permanent settlement was

109 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
110 Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, op. cit., p. 1805.
effected there were provisions to safeguard the position of the tenants. He continued to say that the zamindars had flouted them. As a result the incidence of rent in Bihar was higher in comparison to other provinces of India. He spoke about rural indebtedness of Bihar on the basis of the findings of Banking Enquiry Committee of the province. He described how the abwabs became 33 per cent of the total jama.

He said, in raising the issue of reforms in defence of the kisans, he was not raising the head of class war as some people alleged. In his defence the Prime Minister said "Here, Sir, I am reminded why some people find a scent of class war in the agitation which is raging all around. The people of the province should be grateful to the Congress...to the Kisan Sabha...", for it is the "kisan sabhawalas" (people belonging to kisan sabha) who are "arousing in them a feeling to peacefully resist a wrong", and is not "committing a wrong and sin".

This view of the Prime Minister got balanced with the following remark on the proposed Bill "This does not make an attack on the system of landlordism in Bihar. This Government has no mind to abolish the system which Lord Cornwallis inaugurated".

While speaking on the Bihar Restoration of Bakasht Lands and Reduction of Arrears Bill No. 3 of 1938, a supporter of the Government, Ramcharitra Singh said in the Legislative Assembly, "On one side, we find you are advised by lawyers to protect yourself, on the other side we find our friends, the Kisan Sabhaites and the Socialists are bringing new ideas and spreading

111 Ibid., p. 1804.
112 Ibid.
them among the peasantry. Government is of Congress Party, and its creed is non-violence. So it is in the middle. They (Government - RKG) want to bring measures to bring about harmony between the two - the Kisan Sabhaitees and Socialists, and the Zamindars...."

It is thus clear from the above that the Congress ministry wanted to strike a balance between the landlords and the kisans, without basically changing the system of Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement, i.e. the system of landlordism. While making tenancy legislation, if the leaders of the Congress entered into agreements with the landlords they never consulted the kisans. The Congress continued with the British tradition of placating the landlords at the cost of sacrificing the fundamental interests of the kisans.

Later on it was asserted by Bihar Provincial Congress Committee on the basis of legislations that the Ministry had substantially fulfilled the agrarian programme adopted at Faizpur and, thus, redeemed the Congress pledge to the kisans. An elaborate statement to this effect was also issued by Rajendra Prasad. This claim was not true. One of the points of agreement between the Congress and the Zamindars was that the Congress Cabinet was not to bring forward any legislation outside the scope of the agreement. This agreement amounted to going back on the implementation of the Faizpur Agrarian Programme.

The claim made by the Congress was contested by the Bihar

Provincial Kisan Sabha. It criticised the compromising attitude of the Congress ministry sharply. It felt that the leadership of Bihar Congress Committee had compromised with the Zamindars. The claim of the ministry was contested in two pamphlets. It was pointed out in the first pamphlet that the Bihar ministry had not fulfilled the Faizpur Agrarian Programme because of the Congress-Zamindar pact. Such a pact Swami Sahajanand thought would not have come about if the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee had published the Report of its Enquiry Committee on agrarian affairs. On the basis of this the Kisans would have certainly blocked the way for that pact. The programme of the Congress "remains as yet unfulfilled".

There was some substance in the allegation regarding the work of the Enquiry Committee. As we have already seen the Bihar Congress Committee leaders were not serious about the inquiry and that is why it never got to be published. This was also in contravention of the resolution passed by the Congress at its Lucknow session.

In the other pamphlet Swami Sahajanand Saraswati showed that the implementation of the clauses dealing with rent reduction was more in the interest of Zamindars and did not "get a fair square deal for the tenants" as it was the aim and claim of the Congress and its Ministry.

115 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, The Other Side of the Shield (Bombay, 1938); Ibid., Rent Reduction in Bihar: How It Works, An Exposure of the Government Claim (Patna, 1939).
116 Ibid., p. 18.
The nature of criticism made by the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was determined by its class approach to the problems. Therefore the relations between the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha were strained on the question of rent reduction. The problem of rent brought the two Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha together in united action, and then, once the Congress formed ministry in Bihar they had to part company. Then onwards they were engaged in furious opposition to each other.

See Chapter V for detailed account of relations between Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.