CHAPTER - III

FARMER’S MOVEMENT IN UTTAR PRADESH

3.1 Introduction:

In the agrarian sector in India, inequities and exploitation have been prevailing since the ancient times giving rise to tension and sporadic outbursts. During the pre-independence period, i.e., during the British rule, the mass of peasantry, i.e., the cultivating peasants and the agricultural labourers who worked on the land without any secure rights were exploited by the feudal landlords—the Zamindars and the Taluqdar. They appropriated the bulk of the produce of land in the form of rent, and in addition extracted 'Nazrana' (gifts) and compelled the cultivators to perform 'begar' (unpaid labour) for them. The imperialist exploitation was superimposed on this feudal exploitation. The British rulers appropriating land revenue and manipulating the terms of trade and prices to their own advantage further aggravated the hardships of the toiling peasantry. The age-old hierarchical social structure, caste and religion came handy to legitimize and perpetuate the exploitation leading to peasant protest which got entwined with the freedom struggle.

After independence, land reforms removed a major source of agrarian tension as the intermediaries were abolished and the peasantry came in direct relation with the State curbing the rapacious loot of the peasant’s produce by the landlords. Unfortunately, these reforms were half-hearted, limited in their scope and purpose and their actual implementation further frustrated the proclaimed objectives. Concentration of land ownership persisted and subsequently grew across the entire country including Uttar Pradesh. But, certain steps taken by late Chaudhary Charan Singh who had a vision for the farmers did help in bringing great relief. Due to his untiring efforts, laws were passed ending the exploitation of farmers and paving the way for ending disparities. These positive developments are discussed here along
with the preparation for the farmers' movement by Chaudhary Charan Singh which generated self-confidence amongst the farmers and made them take to agitation in the late 1980s and 1990s.

The farmers movement has been studied from different perspectives and its understanding is based on the work done by sociologists and scholars from various disciplines. The ideological foundation of the movements with particular reference to its strong political backing is based on the analysis of social science scholar, Terence J. Byres who has done comprehensive work on Charan Singh. Political and economic insight into the emergence and sustenance of the BKU movement is provided by the writings of political scientist, Zoya Hasan who has written extensively on the BKU movement.

The decade of the 1980s witnessed the emergence of two interrelated changes in Uttar Pradesh. The first represented an unfolding and crystallization of agricultural transformation and the second, the growing momentum of surplus-producing farmers as a major political force in UP. Both these developments were precursors to the growth of a powerful farmers’ movement during the 1980s, when farmers were involved to demand remunerative prices for agricultural commodities and cheaper inputs attracting the attention of political parties across a wide spectrum.

In the forefront of the farmers' movement in UP was the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), formed in 1978, with units established in Delhi, Haryana and western UP. The origins of the farmers’ organisations lie in conflicts within the ranks of the ruling class. Thus both Uttar Pradesh and Haryana branches of BKU were formed in 1978 by Charan Singh after he was ousted from the Desai cabinet, and this was actually done to demonstrate his power and support. In 1980, the Punjab Khetibari Zamindar Union, a farmers' organisation, was converted into the BKU Punjab unit giving a big fillip to the movement in North-West India. The UP branch failed to show much activity at the time of its formation. In fact the
BKU came into prominence only in 1987, when a concerted effort was made to resurrect the organization in order to fill the political vacuum after the death of Charan Singh.

Largely because of the Lok Dal’s failure to extract any major concessions from the Congress government on the issue of higher prices for agricultural produce, farmers’ politics were in abeyance at this juncture. Fissures in the Lok Dal led to leading emergence of two leading factions headed by Ajit Singh, son of Charan Singh, and H. N. Bahuguna, the erstwhile Chief Minister of UP, respectively. The revival of the BKU was thus another attempt to fill a political vacuum.

Under the leadership of Mahendra Singh Tikait, the BKU captured national attention in the winter of 1988, when its supporters laid siege to Meerut in western UP, in pursuit of demands for higher sugarcane prices, lower farm input prices, waiver of loans, higher rural investment and a lowering of electricity and water rates. Thousands of farmers thronged the Commissioner’s office in Meerut for over three weeks, dramatically placing the farmers’ demand before government, media and public at large. This was followed by a massive rally in Delhi in October 1988. Both agitations were militant in nature and received widespread support; they lasted for days, roads were blocked, and villages were closed to government officials and politicians. Farmers refused to pay taxes and electricity bills, or to clear their interest on loans from banks and credit cooperatives [Hasan, 1989]. It quickly became apparent that the farmers' movement had struck a responsive chord in western UP's rural areas, and captured the imagination of large sections of the rural community. Leaders of all political parties were anxious to associate themselves with the movement, in order to be seen as champions of the farmers.

Charan Singh, whom Tikait acknowledged as his mentor, was deeply involved in party politics. He pursued power within the existing system and through the party system, with the object of bringing about a shift in the balance of economic power from cities to the
rural areas. He challenged congress supremacy by constructing an alliance of middle and backward castes, and succeeded in marginalising the Congress in Western UP during the 1970s. By contrast, the leadership of the farmers' movement calculated that its effectiveness would be greatest when it acted as a pressure group outside the established party system (Gupta, 1988). Neutrality was perceived as crucial for establishing the credibility of the BKU in the eyes of the government, and also because Tikait had moved farmers' politics on to the streets (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987).

Now, the pertinent questions are - what were developments in Indian politics and economy that caused the farmers' movement to emerge? What kind of a movement was the BKU? What was the nature of its appeal? An editorial in the *Economic and Political Weekly* attributed the rise of farmers' movements since the late 1970s to the terms of trade having moved against the rural sector (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 Sept. 1980).

The impact of the farmers' movement was greatest in those areas of UP where the new agricultural technology brought about a rapid increase in production and incomes. Productivity levels in UP were quite low until the early 1980s, when a major breakthrough in agricultural production was achieved as a result of introduction of new technology. The most significant improvements occurred in wheat, maize and sugarcane production; average yields increased, for wheat from 15.50 quintals per hectare in 1978-79 to 18.69 quintals in 1984-85, and for maize from 6.85 quintals per hectare to 15.17 quintals in the same period. Fertiliser consumption in the state had risen to 52 Kilograms per hectare in 1980-81, and the number of tractors in use to 107 per 1000 hectares (Westley, 1986). All this contributed to an annual growth rate in food grain production of 2.79 per cent from 1960-61 to 1978-79, a period during which the average food grain yield per hectare was 1068 Kilograms (*ibid.*). The growth rate of UP's economy throughout the 1980s was 3.5 per cent. Within UP itself the western region, comprising 19 districts, witnessed a markedly faster growth than other parts
of the state. Along with Harayana and Punjab, the region of UP covering Meerut, Agra, Bareilly and Moradabad divisions experienced the largest growth of rural capital investment, processing and small-scale industries in the Green Revolution era. On virtually all the indices of growth and modernisation western UP achieved considerable progress, and by the early 1980s this region was substantially ahead of other regions of the state. The impact of the Green Revolution was greater in this region partly because the western districts were well endowed with canals and irrigation work established at the turn of the century, as a result of which the *Doab* (fertile land in between two rivers) was transformed into one of the richest tracts during the colonial period. This process of regional growth also manifested itself in the emergence of an infrastructure and the expansion of market towns; commercial farming also gained impetus from the tradition of peasant proprietorship, a prominent feature of the agrarian structure in this part of the state. More importantly, class polarisation between absentee landlords and peasant producers did not occur to the same degree in the western region as it did in the eastern parts of the state.

Within Western UP, the fastest growing districts were Meerut, *Muzaffarnagar*, Saharanpur, Bulandshahr, *Aligarh*, Moradabad, Bareilly, Bijnor and *Pilibhit*, with productivity of major crops ranging from Rs.1,459 per hectare in Bareilly to Rs.2397 per hectare in Muzaffarnagar in 1980-83. Overall, by the early 1980s nearly 42 of UP's 57 districts had productivity levels exceeding Rs.1,000 per hectare, and the majority of these were in western UP. This increase was mainly due to the extensive irrigation and cropping intensity, nearly 85 per cent of the area under wheat in UP is irrigated (*Government of India*, 1992). Almost the entire area under wheat in Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Bulandshahr and Aligarh is irrigated.

The economic discontent fuelling the farmer's movement was generally the result of increasing aspirations frustrated by the deterioration in the agriculture-industry terms of trade.
The prices of food grains relative to manufactured goods rose by 50 per cent from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s (Mitra, 1977). From the mid-1970s, however, there has been an adverse flow in terms of trade for the agricultural sector, as reflected in the wholesale prices of agricultural and manufactured products (Rao, 1983; Nadkarni, 1987). This means that, though prices of agricultural produce have been rising, they have not kept pace either with those of non-agricultural operations or with rising consumption levels. Although rich farmers were affected because the scale of profits was reduced, middle farmers with modest quantities of surplus to dispose in the market suffered more due to the sharp rise in prices of essential manufactured goods.

The aspirations of farmers were further heightened by the critical national importance of food surpluses produced in this region. North India became the main source of food supply for the urban areas. This gave farmers a bargaining power which their counterparts in western and southern India did not have at the national level. Small farmers in these regions also backed and in fact such agitations were more successful precisely where small and medium farmers were drawn to expand the support base. This was the case in western UP where sugarcane was grown by medium and small farmers, all of whom have been enthusiastic supporters of the BKU. They focused attention primarily on higher prices of sugarcane and the waiver of loans made to cane cultivators. Their agitation and militancy was strengthened by the structure of cane cultivation in UP (Table 3.1). Cane is cultivated largely by medium and semi-medium holdings and also to some extent by rich peasant households. This is evident from the large number of cultivators supplying cane to sugar mills: 25,000 to 30,000 in UP, compared to 3,500 to 4,000 cultivators in Maharashtra (Baru, 1990). The political and economic clout of cane cultivators was considerably enhanced by the patronage and backing given by Charan Singh to the demand for nationalization of sugar mills in UP (Charan Singh, 1981).
Table: 3.1
SUGARCANE CULTIVATION BY SIZE-CLASS OF OWNERSHIP HOLDING 1970-71 (% SHARE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Holding</th>
<th>Size Class (Hectares)</th>
<th>All-India</th>
<th>UP</th>
<th>Maharashtra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>0.0-0.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>0.0-1.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Medium</td>
<td>2.0-4.0</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>4.0-10.0</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>10.0 and above</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The economic and social contradictions in the BKU movement were obscured ideologically by a farmer ideology which articulated issues in a populist style (Dhanagare 1988). The BKU presented an urban point of view, arguing that development was systematically biased against the countryside and this was deeply embedded in the political structure and bureaucracy which had neglected the legitimate interests of farmers. Such populism emphasised the contradiction between the rural agricultural and urban industrial sectors, rather than the differences between classes in the countryside. Tikait’s struggle, therefore, was not confined to the acceptance of the BKU charter of demands, it was also a movement to safeguard the honour, dignity and self-respect of all farmers, irrespective of caste or class (NavbharatTimes. 8 Feb. 1989). The BKU variety of populism highlighted the moral character of the movement, and is summed up in the following words of Tikait: "No dispute can ever be solved satisfactorily by legality, it can be settled only through truthfulness. The farmer must go on protesting in the hope that "some day sense will drawn on an insensitive state" (Times of India, 9 Aug. 1989).

3.2 Chaudhary Charan Singh - an 'organic' Intellectual:

Perhaps, Chaudhary Charan Singh was one of the most misunderstood leaders who have been dubbed as the leader of the jats and was at times ridiculed by the so-called intellectuals within the country, but, the work done by him was duly appreciated by the
reputed social scientists of different countries. Terence J. Byers, social scientist from University of London illustrates the intellectual disdain of the educated elites towards him by giving two concrete examples, "Charan Singh's intellectual credentials are seldom treated seriously. I recall that when, in 1982, Charan Singh's book, "Economic Nightmare of India (Singh, 1981) was sitting on my desk in London, a highly intelligent young Indian student, from a wealthy urban family, in his final year as an undergraduate, picked it up and asked, incredulously: 'Did he write this himself?' The question was significant, in its dismissiveness of any possible credentials Charan Singh might have as an intellectual. 'Dangerous' he might be, but not a serious intellectual. More significantly, during a six-month visit to India I made in 1978-79, when I traveled extensively throughout the country, an earlier book, 'India's Economic Policy, The Gandhian Blueprint' (Singh, 1978) had recently appeared. Had it been published some three or so years earlier—before the Emergency it would scarcely have been noticed (indeed, his Economic Nightmare of India, published in 1981, received little attention outside the Lok Dal circles). But, in 1978-79, Charan Singh was there on the national scene, vying for the highest office in the land. He could hardly be ignored. I was reading it and mentioned it to several people. A common response was to suggest that he could not possibly have written it himself.

Even among the few scholars who have taken Charan Singh seriously at the intellectual level, and who are familiar with his writing, there is a reluctance to give him full credit as an intellectual. Thus, for example, Paul Brass, whose knowledge and sympathetic understanding of Charan Singh is considerable, observed in 1965: 'Charan Singh is not exactly an intellectual in politics, but he is a well-read man, with incisive intelligence which he had devoted to a continuing study of agricultural problems in Uttar Pradesh' (Brass, 1965: 139).

More than five decades of Chaudhary Charan Singh's career as a politician amply
demonstrates that he was much successful in projecting the problems and taking effective steps to solve these problems of the farmers whom he represented while in power at various levels and even while sitting in opposition. He was continuously thinking about the farmers and the ways and means to improve their lot. We now turn to his intellectual practice and later we shall be discussing his 'political action.'

3.3 FARMER’S MOVEMENT IN UTTAR PRADESH AND THE ROLE OF CHARAN SINGH'S POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND ACTION:

Uttar Pradesh is known for some of the earliest stirrings among the peasants and evidences of mass participation in struggles against the foreign and native exploiters are found even in the pre-1857 civil disturbances, as well as, during the 1857 war of Indian Independence itself. In the post-1857 period too, peasant unrest and stirrings occurred. This led the British rulers to rationalise the system of revenue assessments and take measures to regulate the conditions of the tenants. We shall be discussing the farmer's movement in two phases—pre-independence, and post-independence. Along with this movements, we would also discuss the role of Charan Singh, as a politician, in redressing the grievance of farmers in pre and post Independence eras.

3.4 Pre-independence Era:

(i) The 1920-22 Period:

The period following World War I saw the re-emergence of the mass peasant movement engulfing several districts in Uttar Pradesh. The peasant movement now had acquired certain new features. Firstly, the participation of the peasants had an unprecedently massive character. Secondly, it was no more a spontaneous expression of anger against individual trader or moneylender but based on certain class demands and by class-based organisations, thus, assuming a general anti-feudal character. Thirdly, the peasant movement was intermingled with the mass movement for national liberation headed by the Indian
National Congress and thus acquired an anti-imperialist edge too. It strengthened and provided mass sweep to the national liberation movement and in turn strengthened itself.

The new setting in which the peasant movement was growing in this period was provided by the resolutions submitted by the Farmer Sabha to the Indian National Congress held in December 1919 at Amritsar. The general demands of the peasants were formulated as hereunder: That peasants all over India should be declared the actual owners of the soil they cultivate; the peasant should be subject to tax but not to rent; and in provinces where the zamindari system prevails, the ownership of lands lent the tenant should be given over to the tenants. Later, in a secret appeal to the Congress on the eve of the Ahmedabad session held in December 1921, a programme for national democratic revolution in India was presented which included the slogan of 'land to the tiller.' The appeal was signed by M.N. Roy and Abani Mukherjee and was widely distributed all over the country and given to the delegates assembled at the Congress session for adoption as a resolution. A section of congressmen in Uttar Pradesh, headed by Jawaharlal Nehru empathized with this peasant movement and sought to build up wider support for it.

A fresh round of the peasant movement called 'Ekta Movement' began Mahilabad in Lucknow District in 1921 and soon spread to Hardoi, Bahraich, Sitapur and Barabanki. The initiative for this movement came from a section of Congress non-cooperators and the khilafatists and evoked mass response. There was active participation of peasants because the local landlords led by notorious and tyrannical landlord Sant Bux Singh openly supported the British authority.

(ii) The No-Rent and No-Tax Campaign of 1930-31:

The 1930s saw a fresh upsurge in the national liberation, as well as, the peasant movements. The great economic depression of 1929-1934 ruined the peasantry, and while the agricultural prices and wages fell, rents and revenue were on the increase. Failure to pay...
up rent and revenue, when they were due, piled up arrears and invited a massive drive for eviction. In the middle of 1928, Baba Ram Chandra again started organising peasants’ meetings when the Simon Commission visited India and the Indian National Congress organised a boycott and black flag campaign. Since nothing came out of this, a round of second mass political struggle became unavoidable.

The UP Congress Committee took initiative to launch the 'no-rent' campaign in Rae Bareilly under inspiration from Pandit Nehru. The landlords were urged to stop revenue payments and the tenants were told to withhold payments of enhanced rents. Later in April 1930, when Mahatma Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement, the two movements merged and provided strength and mutual cooperation to each other. The entire 'doab' districts from Meerut to Allahabad and the poorer and more rack-rented districts in Southern and Eastern Oudh were engulfed by it. For the first time, young Congress and Communist workers worked in unison to give organised mass character to the movement.

With the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1931, the Civil Disobedience Movement was discontinued and the 'no-rent' campaign in UP was also suspended. But, since, the Government had failed to give adequate relief to the distress-hit peasants of UP and massive repression of peasants continued, the UP Congress Committee planned to resume it. It set up an Enquiry Committee which brought out a well documented Report "Agrarian Distress in the United Provinces." This report highlighted distress of the peasantry and the atrocities that were being perpetrated by the police and the Zamindars’ goondas on the peasantry in general and such peasants in particular who had participated in the 'no-rent-no-tax' campaign in 1930. The 'no-rent' campaign was again launched in December 1931 by the UP Congress Committee and spread to the entire Oudh and some districts of Agra region as well. The renewed campaign gained unprecedented momentum and in the course of just seven months, about 10,000 peasants and other Congress and Communist activists were arrested and sent to
The bulk of them belonged to the ranks of poor tenants and agricultural labourers. The landlords and the Government came together and tried to set up ‘Aman Sabhas’ to counter this movement. Sporadic incidents of violence were also reported from many districts where attack on landlords and their hirelings were made in retaliation to torture and repression of peasants. The campaign gradually lost tempo and petered out as some constitutional reforms were announced by the Government but was ultimately abandoned on a call from the All India Congress.

The second phase of the mass peasant movement which saw the Congress giving leadership, resulted in two major achievements. Firstly, the peasant problem was more deeply studied and understood and a much clearer agrarian programme was formulated. Secondly, a radical wing in the Congress committed to anti-feudal land reforms programme emerged. But to counter this move, the pro-landlord lobby also consolidated itself inside the Congress. The appeal issued by Mahatma Gandhi to the peasants not to withhold rents from landlords and stop their agitation and to the landlords assuring them that 'Congressmen will on their part see to it that 'Farmers' scrupulously fulfill their obligations to the Zamindars' indicates this. Mahatma Gandhi bluntly declared in his 'Manifesto to the Farmers of UP', that "we do not seek to injure the Zamindars. We aim not at destruction of property. We aim only at its lawful use.'

(iii) The Period 1936-1947:

It has been noted earlier that the formation of Fanner Sabha in UP can be traced back to 1918. Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya took initiative for forming such an organisation and formulating a memorandum of demands to the Commission headed by Montague Chelmsford and place their point of view to counter the landlords.

The 'no-rent-no-tax' campaign of 1930's saw fairly prolonged and mass-scale participation of poor peasants and agricultural labourers over large parts of UP and helped to
create the subjective conditions for setting up an independent class organisation of the peasants. This move helped in uniting the entire peasantry on the basis of a well formulated charter of demands. The experience gained in the course of the two major peasant movements of 1920’s and 1930’s had amply established that the congress and the national liberation movement can gain immensely and acquire mighty striking power against the alien imperialist rule if the mass peasant movement based on their specific demands is built up and congressmen actively support and participate in it. On the other hand, the leaders of the peasants had also seen that their movement and organisation acquires strength when it gets intertwined with the national liberation movement and gets political support from the organisations and parties associated with the same.

At a meeting of the left-minded political workers held on January 15, 1936 at Meerut on the occasion of the National Congress of the Congress Socialist Party, preliminary steps were taken to convene an All India Farmer Congress. This Conference to set up the All India Farmer Congress, later called the All India Farmer Sabha, was held in April 1936 on the occasion of the Annual session of the Indian National Congress held at Lucknow under the presidency of Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru. He pleaded, in his Presidential Address for collective affiliation of the independently functioning of workers’ and Peasants’ organisations with the Indian National Congress and exhorted congressmen to work among the workers and peasants for organising and waging struggles for their specific class demands. He personally attended the conference of the peasant workers from all over the country to set up the All India Farmer Congress and greeted its formation. But both Gandhiji and Sardar Patel were hostile and opposed to formation of independent class organisation of the peasants from the very beginning.

A fortnightly journal ‘Farmer’ and a weekly ‘Naya Hindustan’ were published to help in this task at the UP level and a ‘Farmer Bulletin’ began to be brought out at the All India
level. This was the period, when radical congressmen, socialists and the communists worked together in the peasant movement with communists functioning as the most virile group. The general elections were in the offing in February 1937. The massive campaign of the Farmer Sabha had its first success in the adoption of the Agrarian Programme at the Faizpur session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1936, although, only three months earlier, the Bombay session of the AICC which issued the election manifesto of the Congress said nothing specific about the peasant demands. Later, the National Convention convened by the Indian National Congress in March, 1937 called upon the Congress legislators to work for the fulfillment of peasant demands as put forward in the agrarian programme adopted at Faizpur Congress. It summarised the key demands as: substantial reduction in rent and revenue; progressive income-tax an agricultural incomes subject to a prescribed minimum; fixation of tenure; relief from burden of rural debt and arrears of rent and revenues; restoration of lands and property confiscated or sold by Government during Civil Disobedience Movements; living wages; and unemployment Relief. On an appeal from All India Farmer Sabha leaders, 19 Pt. Nehru also agreed to the inclusion of an interim moratorium on agrarian debts.

The Second World War commenced and the Congress Government resigned soon thereafter. The British Government launched a general round up of all communists and radical congressmen and put them behind bars. The Farmer Sabha activists down to the village level were arrested and their offices raided and sealed at most of the places. Absence of Farmer Sabha leaders from the scene, except some who succeeded in evading arrest by going underground but could now function in a very restricted manner; suspension of the operation of the anti-ejectment provisions of the Tenancy Act and active support of the Government and its bureaucracy enabled the landlords to carry out evictions of their tenants on a massive scale and beat up and torture those who had been actively following the Farmer Sabha and the radical Congressmen. In the course of the period between 1940-1945, some
eight lakh ejectment suits under sections 163-65, 171 175-79 and 180 were disposed off and in about 6.84 lakh cases, ejectments were allowed involving nearly eight lakh acres of land from which eviction took place. Collection of rent was resorted more ruthlessly as is indicated by the fact that during 1941-45 total amount collected as rent was Rs. 10.07 crores and 58.11 percent of the total rentals demand in the preceding quinquennium 1936-1941. The Zamindars’ surplus of rent collected over revenue demand was the highest ever at Rs. 3.25 crores. The percentage of surplus over rent collected was also the highest ever at 32.17 percent.

The top rightist Congress leadership had earlier during 1939-1942 ensured that the radical forces are decimated under the onslaught of the British repressive machine; they had also taken inner organisational measures for the furtherance of the same ends by disaffiliating several left-oriented and mass-based provincial congress units. And now they wanted to use this large scale outbreak of disturbances as a pressure on the already concerned British authority to effect a compromise on the issue of transfer of Power. But the deeply discontented and brutally exploited mass of people - the peasantry in the countryside and the middle-classes in the urban area - took the opportunity of attacking and paralysing the British oppressive machinery. The entire struggle, however, nowhere displayed any anti-feudal edge.

Attempts at capturing, splitting and later at setting up of rival Farmer organisation was also made by the rightist Congressmen and Congress socialists. Earlier in 1940, when the Communist functionaries of the Farmer Sabha had been arrested, Congress socialist leader Mohan Lal Gautam with the backing of Congressmen, tried to capture the Farmer Sabha organisation and its offices by declaring himself as President, and nominating new office bearer and representatives on the All India Farmer Council. Later, in early 1942, Pt. Nehru, himself came out with a call to Congressmen to dissociate themselves from Farmer Sabha in
view of the political policy of the Communist, on the question of war which was contrary to that of the Congress. He advised them to organise their own work among the peasants directly on behalf of the Congress or such Farmer Sabha units as were under control of others than communists. This was, implicitly, a call for splitting and/or capturing the Farmer Sabha. These disruptive moves were, however, headed by the Farmer Sabha workers who had escaped arrests; they reorganised the Farmer Sabha by calling an active workers’ meeting and appointing Shri S.P. Tripathi as President and Shankar Dayal Tewari as the Secretary of the UP Farmer Sabha.

The release of political prisoners in 1945 after the Second World War ended, unfolded a new situation. General elections were to be held in 1946. Hectic moves for the transfer of political power were also on. The period witnessed a new upsurge in mass peasant activity under the leadership of the U.P. Farmer Sabha. With the end of war and release of political prisoners, there was scope for freely and legally working among the masses. The U.P. Farmer Sabha began its new massive mobilisation campaign for the urgent demands of the peasants by organising a 'Farmer Demands Day' in April 1946 all over UP. The demands popularised were to abolish zamindari without compensation immediately; end debts on peasants; stop repression and corruption; curb the black marketers; and arrange distribution of essential articles for rural poor through fair price shops. Public meetings, processions and demonstrations were organised in a large number of districts for the first time after a lapse of several years of total ban on open mass political activity.

Another round of protests were organised against the compulsory grain levies and bureaucratic harassment and excesses in that regard. Exposure of how Patwaris were making wrong entries regarding acreage and crops, showing no consideration for the damage to crops due to drought and putting full burden on the share-croppers was conducted. Aligarh, Meerut, Hardoi, Gonda, Bahraich, Ballia. Basti, Rae Bareilly, Unnao, Orai and several other centres reported such protest actions.
The UP Tenancy Act, 1939 and the earlier executive order staying all ejectment from Sir lands were being violated by the zamindars. The onslaught of the zamindars had been stepped up following resignation of congress ministry and ban on political and mass activity following the commencement of war. Large-scale eviction was being resorted to so that claims of old tenants are evaded and 'Nazrana' could be extracted by settling the Sir land with new tenants. A big struggle against evictions and restoration of land to the old tenants was launched. The slogans issued were (i) ejectment but reinstatement of evicted Farmers; (ii) no zamindar to possess communal lands like pastures; (iii) all cultivable waste land to be given to cultivators; and (iv) increase the wage rates.

A series of district level conferences were organised on this issue. Basti, Rae Barielly and Unnao became major centres of struggle against the landlords. The landlords launched ferocious ‘zoolum’. The hirelings of the sheikh of ‘chetra’ estate in Basti raided the village Dundwa, looted the peasants and set fire to the entire village. ‘Sihorwa’ village was also attacked but peasants chased off the goondas. The peasants counter-attacked by occupying Sir lands under direct cultivation of zamindars on a large scale. Social boycott of zamindars was organised so that zamindars' lands remained fallow. The battle raged in scores of villages in Bansi and Domariyaganj tehsils and a large group of villages in the chetra estate. The Sheikh of Chetra was compelled to confer hereditary right on the tenants and give over some one thousand acres of his Khudkasht lands.

Another 2,500 to 3,125 acres of land were also seized by the peasants. A big battle was also fought against the Raja of Shohratgarh. At several places agreements for wage increase were effected. ‘Bataidars’ were also organised to harvest their crops and carry the harvest to their home. Section 145 was promulgated by the government to check 'Bataidars” from harvesting their crops. Arrests and prosecutions under section 107 and 117 were also made and false cases registered against a large number of Farmer Sabha workers.
In Rae Bareilly, struggles were launched by the Farmer Sabha in four estates—Kurri Sadauli, Sheogarh, Tikari and Raja Mau. The fight was against evictions, 'begar', cutting of farmers 'trees', demolition of their huts and low wages. In Kurri Saduli, the lands of evicted tenants were restored, wages increased and 'Degari' stopped, after thousands of peasants marched and forcibly occupied the lands. The Raja of Sheogarh launched terror campaign and attacks on peasant leader Jitendra Tiwari. Attempt was made to arrest Munshi Kalika Prasad, the popular peasant leader of Rae Bareilly of 1920’s and 1930’s peasant struggles fame. Six thousand peasants held protest rally against the attack on Jitendra Tiwari and 12000 peasants rallied and foiled the attempt to arrest Mumshi Kalika Prasad. Ultimately the peasants won back their land. Some tenants got their land on 'batai' basis. Some notorious 'Karindas' were got sacked. 'Begar' was stopped. In Sablamau estate also 'Begar' was stopped and rights of access to forest lands were won.

In Unnao also fight against eviction through reoccupation of land, occupation of several hundred 'Parati' land, and fight for wage increase was organised. In spite of fierce attack of landlords on Farmer Sabha workers, raid by their goondas to burn down and destroy 'Marxnagar' and large scale repression launched by Government, the landlords' offensive was beaten back, rights over 'Parti' land won and wage increases obtained. Ram Sajiwan emerged as a hero nick-names 'Shere Samasia' for organising volunteer corps and fighting back landlords' goondas. More than a hundred activists including leaders like Ram Ghulam Singh and his wife, Sheo Kumar Misra and Shanker Dayal Tiwari were arrested. * In Unao agitation for more irrigation facilities, cheaper and better seeds and manures and 'taqavi' loans for agricultural purposes was also launched. Success was achieved in this regard also and government distributed 'taqavi' loans, opened cheap grainships and undertook works programme to provide employment for landless labour.

The nature of the farmers problems in Uttar Pradesh evoked different reactions.
However, the response of Charan Singh is significant as he played the crucial role in the dynamics of the problems being faced by the farmers before and after independence of the country. The following section would clearly indicate the closeness between the problems of the farmers being propagated by the farmers movements leaders and the ideology and action taken by Charan Singh while occupying different positions in the government.

3.5 **CHARAN SINGH'S IDEOLOGY:**

(i) **Anti-landlordism:**

Charan Singh’s hatred of the class of large and powerful landlords, or zamindars, ran deep, and he never faltered in his uncompromising and scathing denunciation of landlordism. Agricultural production did not depend upon the existence of the landlord class, 'who render no service to the land or the tenants' (Singh, 1947B: 15). Rent was 'a wholly unnecessary payment', made to 'a class of persons who simply live upon the labour of others, who take absolutely no part in any enterprise and whose profession is idleness' (loc. cit.). Landlordism 'reduces the toiling masses to the starkest poverty and degradation' (loc. cit.); it 'has cramped both men and crops... (and) has stood for economic inequality and political reaction' (Singh, 1947b: Ch. I, especially 14-19). In such circumstances one might advocate the reform of tenancy: with the state intervening to ensure security of tenure: the abolition of undesirable tenancy forms, like sharecropping; and 'fair' rents. Charan Singh would have no truck with that. Landlordism had to go. Charan Singh has always claimed Gandhi as his mentor (his 1978 book, India’s Economic Policy, is subtitled The Gandhian Blueprint).

(ii) **Peasant Proprietorship:**

From the outset of the exposition of his position, in his first major work, published in 1947, 'Abolition of Zamindari: Two Alternatives' (Singh, 1947b), pre-eminent in his prescriptions was 'the system of land tenure... pleased by the well-known French social philosopher, Proudhon, a century ago, viz., peasant proprietorship, that is, ownership of the land by the
man who actually tills it’ (Singh, 1947b: 22). That remained a constant in his discourse (see, for example, Singh [1959: v-vi, 1—3]; Singh [1964:v—vi, 3—6]; Singh [1978: 11—12, 16, 25, 119]; Singh [1981: 122]. A detailed case is argued (Singh, 1947b: Ch.v, 127—61), which we cannot pursue here.

(iii) The Case against Collectivization and Cooperative Agriculture:

He developed a detailed and passionate argument against collectivisation, the socialist solution to the agrarian question, and a deadly threat to his ideal of peasant proprietorship. Collectivisation was anathema. In his first book, whose Preface is dated October 1946, socialism is rejected via a detailed examination of the only example he had before him, that of the Soviet Union (Singh, 1947b: Chs, ii, iii, iv, 23-126). He would refer often, in subsequent works, to the Soviet Union; and post 1949 China, too, attracted his attention. It is that first book, however, that he develops his case against collectivisation, with care and in detail. It is not possible here to convey the full scope of his argument.

In the late 1950s, he saw the introduction of cooperative agriculture, in the sense of cooperative working of the fields rather than service cooperatives, as a true threat. He supported the later, but opposed the former, with no less intensity than he did collectivisation. Indeed, cooperative agriculture was regarded at worst as synonymous with collectivisation, and at best a prelude to it.

It would create a new class of intermediaries, as bad as the hated zamindars, and 'prepare the ground for authoritarian control' (Singh, 1964: vii); it would undermine and destroy peasant proprietorship; and reduce the fanner to a mere farm hand (Singh, 1964: vi). The increase in the size of the operational unit would lead, inexorably, to a fall in output per acre; and the disadvantage of size would be compounded several times over by widespread mechanisation and its attendant evils, of pervasive unemployment, and a heavy import bill for machinery, which India could ill afford (Singh, 1964: vi-viii). The case against cooperatives,
indeed, ushered in a new concern and included a new argument against mechanisation:

(iv) **The Attitude towards Capitalism:**

Charan Singh, in true neo-populist style, displayed a less passionate, although firm, anti-capitalist stance which was clearly stated in 1947. It would be repeated, in somewhat different form, in the 1950s and 1960s (Singh, 1959; Singh, 1964), in the 1970s (Singh, 1978), and in the 1980s (Singh, 1981). The early statement is of particular interest. Several issues were raised.

First, there was the relationship of 'peasant proprietary' to capitalism, and here Charan Singh conducted a dialogue with Marxism. He confronted and rejected two arguments. On the one hand, there was the 'hackneyed objection... that this system envisages a pre-capitalist society out of which Capitalism has emerged, and that its establishment or re-establishment' would mean turning back of the wheel of progress' (Singh, 1947b: 140). This he denied, arguing that 'small private property in land ... instead of being a "fetter on production" is rather an encouragement to higher production'.

3.6 **POLITICAL ACTION OF CHARAN SINGH:**

**Pre-Independence Era:**

Charan Singh's first attempted legislative act on behalf of his agrarian constituents had as its target - traders. This was in 1938. He had published, in the Hindustan Times, in March and April of 1938, an article on 'Agricultural Marketing' (Singh, 1938). Later in that year he introduced into the UP Legislative Assembly, as a private member, an Agricultural Produce Markets Bill which sought 'to safeguard the interests of the producer against the rapacity of the trader' (Singh, 1986: 2). In this, his initial legislative effort on behalf of 'peasant,' he was not successful. But he was serving his political apprenticeship and acquiring rare expertise. He tells us that it was not until 1964 that such a bill was passed in UP (Singh, 1986:2).
A Second target, 1939: Moneylenders:

Charan Singh was prominent, in 1939, in formulating and introducing the Debt Redemption Bill. Again, he tells us of opposition from the 'moneylenders lobby', and of his 'great disillusionment that some leading lights of the Congress Socialist Party, including, for example, Acharya Narendra Dev, who professed such great solicitude for peasants and workers from the public platform, took up a strong creditor attitude' (loc. cit.) This time he was successful, and he tells us that the bill 'brought great relief to the peasantry' (Singh, 1986:3).

Focus Upon Landlordism:

Other of his action before 1947, which he draws to our attention, is worthy of note. They are none for them spectacular, or particularly successful. But they carry the seeds of future political action of considerable significance. On 5 April 1939, he brought before the Executive Committee of the Congress Legislature Party a resolution calling for the reservation of a minimum of 50 percent of public employment 'for the sons and dependents of the cultivators or agriculturists who formed the mass of our people' (Singh, 1986: 2). That was not considered, since the party resigned from the legislature in October 1939. His persistence on behalf of agrarian interests was becoming obvious, however.

Charan Singh was preparing himself politically and ideologically as the farmer champion. It was after 1947, however, that the fruits of that preparation ripened, and the middle and rich peasantry found in him a representative of power, political skill and effectiveness. It was the landlord class that would first feel the full impact.

II

37 POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

(i) 1947 - 1952:
The year 1947, the year of transfer of power coincided with the campaign for abolition of zamindari. It was a common sight to see the same set of people who thundered from the platforms of rival communal organisations like the Hindu Maha Sabha and Muslim League and incited people to cut each others' throats, sitting together on the common platform of Landlords' Association and shouting for the Communists’ blood who were 'instigating' the Farmers to seize their land and agricultural labourers to stop work unless wages are increased. Several other such disruptive organisations were coming up such as the Ram Rajya Parishad. The Congressmen and the Government also stepped up their activity among peasants. Series of Farmer Conferences were organised which were addressed by Govind Ballabh Pant, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Thakur Hukum Singh and Charan Singh. Anti-communist speeches were made and peasants, particularly the tenants and the share-croppers were called upon to shun them and rely the legal process for the solution of their problems rather than try to seize land or harvest the crops under Communists' 'instigation'.

The AICC resolution passed in March 1948 prohibited membership of Congress for anyone who is a member of some other party. Thus, the Indian National Congress, conceived as a mighty front of all Indians, fighting for freedom in the pre-independence period was not transformed into a party. This compelled the Congress Socialist Party to part company with the Congress through a resolution passed at their Conference held in Nasik and form a separate Socialist Party of India.

A major event of this period was the bringing out of a mighty demonstration of peasants before the UP Assembly on November 29, 1949 under the leadership of the Socialist Party and the UP Hindi Farmer Panchayat demanding early passing of the anti-zamindari law and reduction of tax burden on the peasants. The Farmer Sabha is reported to have secretly decided to join and strengthen this demonstration called by the socialist party, since their own independent activity was restricted; credence to this view is provided by the fact that among
the marchers were also contingents of peasants from the traditional communist and Farmer Sabha pockets of influence. Some 50,000 peasants from all-over the State came to Lucknow for this demonstration. Such a demonstration of peasants was seen after more than a decade, i.e., since after the famous March 1, 1938 Farmer Sabha demonstration.

(ii) 1953-1969:

The UP Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act was finally passed in January 1951 and got assent of President within a week of its being passed. It was enforced with effect from July 1, 1952 after the petitions of the landlords challenging the Act were finally dismissed by the High Court and the Supreme Court. The Act, in its final form, was not favourably taken by the Farmer Sabha. They were particularly critical about allowing the zamindars to have Bhumidari rights in their Sir and Khudkasht land straightaway. They were also opposed to payment of any compensation to the landlords and at such high rates. They were also highly critical and hostile to the clause requiring the Sirdars to deposit ten times of the land revenue for acquiring Bhumidhari rights. Further, they were sore that the Act did not contemplate any distribution of land among the landless agricultural labourers and had totally deviated from the accepted principle of 'land to the tiller'. The Farmer Sabha regrouped and reorganised itself by holding its seventh annual Conference in 1953 at Makur in district Unnao.

(a) Anti-Eviction Movement:

The struggle against landlords’ drive for eviction of peasants on a mass scale was sought to be given on organised shape by holding an anti-eviction convention at Lucknow in 1953 and organising a demonstration before the UP Assembly on September 1, 1953. Mass petitions under section 31 to get the land records rectified were prepared and submitted through demonstrations before Tehsil and District headquarters. Some seventy thousand petitions were submitted in Eastern Districts alone. Several thousand meetings were held and
several hundred demonstrations were organised in the State. In **Azamgarh**, the Farmer Sabha and the Praja Socialist Party organised Satyagraha on this issue and several hundred peasants and peasant workers were jailed. In **Unnao**, this campaign could secure the support of congress, where the District Congress Committee passed a resolution supporting the demand of the peasants for stopping eviction. Some thirty four percent of these petitions were settled in favour of peasants, the records were rectified and the rights over land protected. Nearly twenty two percent of these petitions were rejected on flimsy technical grounds, mainly because the Farmer Sabha workers at the grassroots level were not tTained enough in law and the formal procedure of preparing and submitting these petitions and the Patwaris and other officials were corrupt and worked under the landlords' influence.

The campaign had to face fierce offensive of the landlords; goondaism and terror to secure forced surrender of land from the Shikmis was stepped up. The Farmer Sabha issued a call to the shikmis to defend their land and the crop and refuse to surrender under pressure. Unnao, Fyzabad, Lucknow, Jahnsi and Lalitpur, **Basti**, Ballia, Varanasi, Ghazipur, Doria, Azamgarh, Herdoi became arena of bitter struggle between the landlords and the peasants for gaining/denying Sirdari rights to Shikmis. The police and the administration shamelessly sided with the landlords. The peasants and Farmer Sabha workers were subjected to intense repression, beatings and torture in thanas, murderous attacks and prosecution.

(b) **Anti-Repression Campaign:**

An anti-repression campaign was conducted. Powerful demonstrations were organised at Tehsil and District headquarters and Thanas all over UP. In Lucknow, Unnao and several other places, the Darogas were transferred. The High Court of UP declared the 'Police Special Powers Act, UP' ultra vires.

(c) **Against Increase in Canal Rates and Panchayat and District Board Taxes:**

The government increased the irrigation charges by 50 percent in 1953. The
Panchayats and **District** Board Taxes were **being** levied ever since these bodies were constituted. The Panchayat taxes and their arrears alone cast a burden of some Rs. 137 lakhs. The district Board Taxes had risen by one-and-a-quarter to two times. Regional and State Conferences were **held in** July-September, 1953 on these issues. Demonstrations were organised at District headquarters and later a mighty demonstration was organised before the UP Assembly at Lucknow on March 10, 1954 and a petition bearing nearly three lakh signatures was presented.

**(d) Anti-Chakbandi:**

The UP Farmer Sabha had declared in a resolution adopted at its Seventh Conference held in 1953 that the 'Chakbandi' drive is an attempt to bypass the basic issue of land reforms involving redistribution of land and ensuring land for the tiller. It also said that the 'Chakbandi' in its present form will harm the bulk of the peasantry who are poor and lack influence. It called for (i) a drive for rectification of land records as a priority task; (ii) no compulsory chakbandi in villages where seventy five percent of the peasants households are opposed **to it**; (iii) exemption of peasants with holdings of two acres or less from the 'chakbandi tax' and taking of land for common purposes; (iv) recognition of 'chaks' already existing without any further change; and (v) association of all Peasant organisations with the consolidation work so that partiality and corruption is curbed.

**(e) For increase in Price of Sugar Cane and Payment of Peasants' Dues:**

There were eighty five sugar mills in UP and some 36.83 lakh acres were under sugarcane in 1976-77. Some 25 to 30 lakh peasants cultivated the sugarcane and were in the main organised in nearly 135 registered cane unions which had 23.62 lakh membership in 1975-76. Though this is a major cash crop, the peasants have been exploited and fleeced by the sugar mills owners through payment of a very low price and holding up of the amounts due to them for years together. The UP Farmer Sabha was among the pioneers to take up their
cause when in 1952 it led a movement of canegrowers in Meerut and Bijnore for payment of the outstanding dues to the peasants and got some Rs. 20-30 lakhs paid to them by each of the mills in those districts. In 1953, the Cane Federation, Praja Socialists Party, Communist Party of India, UP Farmer Sabha and some congressmen combined their resources to organize the cane growers strike demanding a higher price for sugarcane and payment of bonus to the growers. Some fourteen lakh cane growers participated in the strike resulting in convening of a Tripartite Conference by the Government and grant of Rs. 0.25 per mauand as bonus by way of a share in the profits. In 1955, the UP Farmer Sabha took the lead in putting across six-point charter of demands of the canegrowers including the demand for bonus for years 1952-53 and 1953-54; increase in price of sugarcane, same price of sugarcane at outer centres; payment of cane cess for 1954-55 immediately, increase in price of Gur; and curbs the arbitrariness and corruption of cane societies. An all-parties meeting was held at Delhi and on its call a 'canegrowers Demands Day' was celebrated on October 20, 1955.

A state-level convention of canegrowers was held at Lucknow and an all India convention met at Delhi. The UP Canegrowers' Convention held on December 19, 1955 under the Presidentship of Shibhanlal Saxena gave a call for one day token strike on January 1, 1956 and a continuous strike of canegrowers from February. The UP Farmer Sabha, the Socialist Party, the Praja Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and a section of UP Sugarcane Federation joined together in organising the token strike which was successful all over UP. Concessions were won and at the instance of cane Federation and the Praja Socialist Party, the continuous strike call was withdrawn.

(f) For a New Food and Land Reforms Policy:

In 1958, the Farmer Sabha took initiative for the launching of a powerful campaign for a change in this policy. It demanded (i) imposition of a ceiling of 20 acres on landholdings immediately; (ii) takeover of all surplus land including the land enclosed by
landlords but actually not brought under cultivation; (iii) distribution of all such land and the 'Parti', 'Banjar' and ‘Usar’ to the landless and the poor peasant; (iv) arrangement for the supply of inputs to all the poor cultivators with smaller holdings and weaker means; (v) guarantee of a better price; (vi) arrangements for the supply of essential consumer articles for the poor in the villages, and (vii) building up of a system of cooperatively regulated market for foodgrains.\(^{38}\) Regional and district conferences were organised. Demonstrations at the district headquarters were organised all August 4, 1958. Gradually the entire state and all political parties were drawn into the movement.

8 POST - INDEPENDENCE ERA; CHARAN SINGH'S POLITICAL ACTIONS:

The Assault **upon Landlordim:**

(1) *Enactment and Provisions of the Zamindari Abolition Act.*

Charan Singh, a long-time opponent of landlordism, designed the UP land reform legislation, whose aim was to strike a mortal blow at the landlord class: the **Zamindari Abolition Act** (Brass, 1980b: 4; Duncan, 1979:2). That, in itself, was an achievement.

The Zamindari Abolition Act's gestation as legislation, quite apart from its implementation, was prolonged. The entrenched power of landlords ensured that. Daniel Thorner refers to 'the preliminaries to, and the stately legislative progress of, zamindari abolition' (Torner, 1956: 48). That, surely, is an accurate description. The legislative process—its preparation, which reached back to the late 1930s, and its successful conclusion—spread over more than a decade. Charan Sigh, successful lawyer and practised politician, bided his time and saw the legislation through to a successful conclusion in terms of enactment. As Parliamentary Secretary of the UP Congress Government from 1946 to 1951, and as a powerful member of the State cabinet from 1951 to 1967, holding posts crucial in the sphere of agrarian relations, he masterminded the Act and took it to its final enacted form.

The Zamindari Abolition Committee in UP appointed in 1946 presented its report in
1948. The Bill based on that report was referred to a Select Committee and was passed by the State Legislature in 1950 and signed by the President in 1951. It became effective only from 1 July 1952... The UP Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, as enacted in 1950, and modified subsequently by amending Acts in 1952, 1954, 1956 and 1958. It now had to be implemented, in the teeth of fierce opposition.

The Assault upon Landlordism:

(2) Re-Organization of the Patwari System.

The enactment of agrarian legislation, in the face of the determined and organised opposition of powerful dominant classes, is, in all conscience, difficult enough. Its implementation, however, faces yet more demanding obstacles. In this instance, a key figure was the village patwari: the keeper of the village records or, to describe him somewhat anachronistically, the village accountant (Thorner, 1956: 47: Duncan, 1979: 2). There was, in UP, a veritable army of patwaris—some 27,000 of them (Singh, 1986: 42, 44, 47). The patwari had existed since long before the arrival of the British; he normally had three to four villages in his charge; and his function in keeping village maps, and records of boundary changes, of tenancies, of levels of rent and changes therein, and of who was in possession of what land, was critical (Neale [1962: 201-2], citing Walsh [1926-51])

The patwari had for long had an apparently dual position. On the one hand, he was the servant of the landlord, who kept 'records of transactions between his master, the zamindar, and the cultivators under his master's aegis—records, that is, of all claims, arrears, advances and doubts in which the zamindar’s interests were involved' (Whitcombe, 1972: 42-3). On the other, he had an allegiance to the state.

The patwari was enmeshed in the local network of power, and subject to the overwhelming authority of the local dominant class. According to one writer the patwari occupied what was 'usually (an) hereditary post' (Neale, 1962: 315). That is no doubt so.
Thomer, however, qualifies that description appropriately: to the effect that when the post fell vacant the landlords had the 'powers of nomination' of the successor (Thomer, [1956: 47], citing the Report of the UP Zamindari Abolition Committee [Whitcombe [Whitcombe, 1972: 43]).

Upon his entries in the village records hinged the determination, in this regard, of the respective rights of cultivators and landlords; while the slow progress of the legislation 'gave to the patwaris of the UP an opportunity such as had never before occurred to them, even in their fondest dreams' (loc. cit.). As Thorner drily observes: 'They did not fail to avail themselves of it' (loc. cit.), their behaviour, in this respect, was open and 'notorious' (loc. cit). At this point, Charan Singh stepped in decisively. He had become Congress Minister for Revenue and Agriculture in 1952, and was acutely aware of the activities of patwaris in falsifying village records. In 1953, they went too far 'when they struck for higher wages' (Thomer, 1956: 48). Charan Singh acted. It was at his prompting that 'the UP Government incurred no popular displeasure by dismissing thousands of them at one stroke' (loc. cit.); and it was he who, at this juncture, 'was responsible for the reorganisation of the patwari... system' (Duncan, 1979: 2). That was a significant achievement.

**Land Consolidation and the Rich and Middle Peasantry:**

*The consolidation of Holdings Act of 1953*

At this period, too, Charan Singh was largely responsible for another important piece of legislation (Duncan, 1979: 2), which smoothed the way for rich and middle peasants in particular, and especially the former (Brass, 1980a: 398). This was the UP consolidation of Holdings Act of 1953, which represented 'programme of land consolidation for individual peasant holdings' (Duncan, 1979: loc. cit.). Fragmentation of holdings, or the existence of operational holdings in more than one plot—often significantly more than one plot—was rife in UP, as in other parts of India. It is still pervasive in most of India. Fragmented Holdings
existed for rich and middle peasants as for poor peasants.

Charan Singh himself observed of the situation in the early 1950s that: 'consolidation of landholdings is a condition precedent to all and any development in the countryside' (Singh, 1986: 102). He was hardly exaggerating. Later, from the mid-1960s, when the 'new technology' became available, the case or consolidation took on added force for the rich peasantry, and this was especially so in relation to mechanisation (Brass, 1980s: 398), which was more or less non-existence in UP agriculture in the early 1950s. For the moment, the consolidation made possible by the Act of 1953 represented a significant step forward, and for that Charan Singh must take much of the credit.

It was a step that was taken far more confidently and more pervasively in western UP—where the rich and middle peasantry were an important force—and which had particular 'significance for the middle and larger landholders' (Brass, 1980s: loc. cit.)

**Resistance to Land Taxation:**

In the 1960s, the rich peasantry emerged ever more strongly as a force to be reckoned with in north-west India. Charan Singh continued to represent their interests, along with those of middle peasants, forcefully, cleverly, and successfully. So far, our account has centred on struggle within the countryside. Now that struggle extended to a confrontation with urban interests and the central state. This was clearly so on two important fronts: taxation and food procurement.

A critical issue in the political economy of post-1947 India has been the inability of the Indian state to tax agriculture adequately, and in particular, within agriculture, rich peasants, along with the other dominant landed classes, most notably, landlords. It is an issue which has attracted considerable attention (for a brief account of the evidence up to the mid-1970s see Byres (1979: 224-7). It is one which remains unresolved.

Charan Singh had won a signal victory, on behalf, especially, of the rich and middle
peasantry. The opposition to increased land taxation was successful both because of Charan Singh’s skillful advocacy and because of adroit political maneuvering. The case which he argued in a lengthy memorandum to C.B. Gupta (reproduced in detail in Singh [1986: 151-94]) is a clever mustering of evidence, a deployment of special pleading and, not least, an open political warning.

Food Procurement:

The Congress government fell in April, 1967 and Charan Singh took over as Chief Minister. His concern of the 1930s with the exploitative activities of traders had long since gone. This was a reflection, no doubt, of the radically altered circumstances, in which rich peasants could now look after their own interests. Poor peasants, heavily indebted and without storage capacity, remained desperately weak and subject to what Charan Singh had earlier called ‘the rapacity of the trader’ (cf. Duncan [1979: 4]). Middle peasants, too, were vulnerable. But not so rich peasants. With access to cheap government credit, and supplied with subsidised inputs, many of them, ‘had developed a storage capacity and an experience of the market which enabled them to engage in speculative practices’ (Duncan, 1979: 5). Charan Singh faced a dilemma. He would have preferred no policy of procurement. He had, in recent years, stated his opposition to government interference. But the pressures upon him to adopt such a policy could not be resisted. He had no obvious concern to defend the interests of traders. If a procurement scheme were to be forced upon him he would have preferred one that looked to the wholesale trade. He had given voice to a ‘preference for the free market and for freedom of the peasant to exploit market conditions to the best of his ability” (Duncan, 1979: 7). But the central government was determined to see compulsory procurement directly from producers. He effected a compromise.

He modified the scheme which had been introduced by the previous Congress administration, and was careful to stress that he was mounting ‘a limited operation dictated
by extraordinary conditions' (Duncan 1979: 7). That operation involved a levy on holdings of
eight acres and above, progressively graded up to 25 acres, and the setting up of government
purchasing centres throughout UP (loc. cit).

(iii) 1970 and After:

The period opened with two major events, viz., (i) setting up of an independent UP
Khet Mazdoor Sabha in 1970 at a State level conference held in Lakhimpur Kheri following
the setting up of a similar national level organisation the Bhartiya Khet Mazdoor Sabha; and
(ii) the launching of the struggle for land and land reforms of 1970 launched on a national
scale under the auspices of a joint committee consisting of the All India Farmer Sabha,
Bhartiya Khet Mazdoor Sabha and the Communist Party of India. The 1970’s marked a
period of a new upsurge and wave of struggles for the redistribution of land, imposition and
implementation of a meaningful ceiling law and massive peasant struggle for remunerative
prices for their produce.

In the second stage of the movement, the capturing of Birla Farm in Lakhimpurkheri
was planned. S.A. Dange was to lead the movement and four jathas from different directions
under leadership of Jharkhane Rai, Sarjoo Pandey, Rustam Satin and Ishaqu Sambhli started
with a view to converge on the Birla Farm on August 15, 1970. The then Chief Minister of
the State, Charan Singh promulgated the Preventive Detention Ordinance and used other
repressive measures. A general round up was ordered and thousands of satyagrahis were
dragged out from the buses and trains proceedings towards Lakhimpur Kheri and arrested.
One Jatha led by Gur Prasad and Bhikha Lal, the General Secretary of the Bhartiya Khet
Mazdoor Sabha and President of UP Khet Mazdoor Sabha, respectively, managed to reach
the Farm and planted the Red Flag. Another important target in UP was the five thousand
acre farm of Raja of Shohratgarh in Basti.

In this period, mobilisation of peasants and agricultural labourers for their demands
and organisation of their marches has also been successfully attempted and massive
demonstrations staged such as on June 1, 1972 for agricultural labourers demands and on
September 13, 1972 for Peasants' Demands Day in Lucknow the UP Assembly and on March
27, 1973 before the Parliament in Delhi. An attempt was also made to bring all Peasant
organisations and workers together around a common programme and towards a united
organisation. A 'Sanyukt Sangharh Samiti' was set up consisting of the two UP Farmer
Sabhas (CPI and CPM), the Sarvodaya and Bhodan workers led by Mahavir Bhai, and others
including some with naxalite views. On their united call, a massive state-level demonstration
was again organised on December 1, 1978 to highlight the urgent demands of the Peasants
and agricultural labourers. While this Sangharsh Samiti has not functioned since then, closer
cooperation was developed between the two Farmer Sabha led by the CPI and CPM. The
struggle for remunerative price for Sugarcane, wheat and Paddy has also been continued with
increasing momentum and militancy. The movement for remunerative prices wage on All
India level had strengthened the movement that had been taking place every crop year in the
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State .

Two other major movements of this period were (1) the 'Chipko Movement' in
Uttarakhand, and (2) the Pant Nagar University agricultural workers' strike. The ‘Chipko
Movement' commenced in March, 1973 in Chamoli district to protest against the
indiscriminate felling of trees by contractors who were given contracts by the authorities of
the Forest Department. The strike of the agricultural labourers and other employees of the
Pantnagar University for wages, better working conditions and trade union rights took place
in April, 1978. There was all-in-unity of the various sections of the employees including the
Farm workers under their union. The authorities of the University encouraged and abetted by
the ‘Terai’ farmers and some Government ministers adopted repressive measures and called
in the police and the PAC for maintenance of law and order. A brutal lathi charge and firing
resembling Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place ironically on the same day, April 13, of the year 1978. The solidarity of the students, teachers and support from the working class, Peasant and student organisations of the State finally succeeded in getting the vice-chancellor removed and securing their main demands.

9 THE KISAN RALLY ON THE EVE OF 76TH BIRTHDAY OF CHARAN SINGH:

The 1970s found Charan Singh on the national stage. He had been Minister of Home Affairs in the Janata government, in 1977-78, and been forced to resign. After his 'expulsion from the cabinet' (Ping, 1979a: 53) he used his large peasant support—overwhelmingly from northern India, but with the strong possibility of its spreading to other parts of the country—as a sword of Damocles in the political struggle then being waged. In the seven months after his enforced resignation, in his national political maneuvering, he used the intimidating prospect of considerable peasant mobilisation, via a mass peasant rally, in his dealings with Morarji Desai and other of the Janata leaders from whom he was estranged.

In the event, the farmer rally did take place, in Delhi, on 23 December 1978, Charan Singh's 76th birthday. According to one estimate, one million farmers attended 'the largest rally in the history of the capital' (Ping, 1979a: 53). There were, it seems, no particularly large contingents from outside northern India. But, addressing the rally, along with Charan Singh, as well as the Chief Ministers of the Punjab (P.S. Badal), UP (Ram Naresh Yadav), and Haryana (Devi Lal), was the Chief Minister of Bihar (Karpoori Thakur); while a message of support arrived from the Chief Minister of Karnataka (Deviraj Urs) [The Hindu, 24, December 1978]. The numbers were sufficiently large and the regional spread sufficiently wide to make a considerable impact. Charan Singh, and what he represented, had to be taken seriously. That this was so in the Janata Party was shown when, very quickly after the farmer rally, on 24 January 1979, Charan Singh became Minister and Senior Deputy Prime Minister [The Hindu, 25 January 1979].
The farmer rally's slogan drew upon populist imagery, invoking the 'urban bias' notion, of which Charan Singh had been a powerful exponent for many years (although he did not use that expression): 'Today, India's villages are the colony of the city' [Ping, 1979a: 53]. It was observed by one commentator; with some accuracy, that the rally 'symbolised the coming of age of the kulak class as formidable political force' [Ping, 1979a: 53]. In that coming of age, Charan Singh had played an influential part. He was now the rich peasantry's leading political representative and major ideologue: a formidable adversary and skilled politician. Urban intellectuals were puzzled as to what quite was to be made of him. There he was, posturing on the national stage, and threatening urban India with an army of peasants.