INTRODUCTION

SECTION I

By strict social science definitions, colonial India was a peasant society. The major sections of the population in villages were peasant. The peasants have a long history of resistance. They have risen against landlords, revenue agents and other bureaucrats, moneylenders, police and military forces, since long past for various kinds of exploitation and oppression in major parts of India. In colonial India, scholars have counted more than sixty struggles since the revolt of 1857. In Orissa, the earliest were the Khurda Paik uprisings (1817-24), and in the hilly tracts of Orissa the tribals and non-tribal peasants rose in revolt throughout the nineteenth century.

However, the peasant struggles, which took place towards the close of the freedom movement and in the immediate aftermath of the Independence, differed from that, flowered during the earlier period as well as those that have been taking place contemporaneously.

The foremost issue or demand around which the peasant movements took place during 19th and 20th century India was the government taxation policy. The peasants sometimes asked for the reduction of exiting levels of taxation either on the ground that crops had failed or that prices have fallen low at other times they resisted unfair enhancement in the existing rates on the ground that they were not

---

3 Gough, Kathleen, "Indian Peasant Uprisings", Economic and Political Weekly, August-September 1974, p. 1391.
5 Mishra, P.K., Political Unrest in Orissa in the 19th Century, Calcutta, 1983, p. X.
6 Doshi, S.L., op.cit., p.34.
based on a fair assessment of peasants’ ability to pay. However, it would be wrong to assume that they called for the abrogation of the system of taxation. Secondly, the peasants demanded occupancy rights on lands they cultivated as tenants of landlords and which once belonged to their ancestors. The landlords instead of recognising their occupancy rights arbitrarily enhanced the rents. Besides these the peasants offered resistance against evictions, rack-renting, and collection of various illegal cesses or abwabs and demand of forced labour or begar.7

However, the peasant resistance from 1858-1914 was necessarily disjointed – a collection of histories of local agrarian relationships and struggles, each of which had its own timetable of revolt. Only with the emergence of new forms of leadership at the national level after 1918 – with Mahatma Gandhi, and with Congress championing peasant demands more militantly – did peasant resistance began to link up once more across the subcontinent to pose a formidable challenge to the colonial state. Although peasant resistance did not thus pose a direct threat to British rule between 1858 and 1914, it continually worried colonial officials. The colonial authorities as well colonial historiographers frequently sought in their reports and writings to deny the reality of such movements. Their resistance was labelled as ‘backward looking and unprogressive’, and their consciousness as ‘primordial’ and ‘superstitious’.

From the 1960s onwards, an interest began to emerge in the peasantry, not as mere objects of the colonial state, but as subjects of their own history.8 But 1970s saw a whole spate of studies on this theme and, one could argue the historiography

of the peasant resistance in colonial India had come into its own. The three basic approaches that have emerged in the writing of modern Indian History are: the Imperialist/Neo-Imperialist, the Nationalist and the Marxist. The Imperialist, Nationalist and Marxist historiography have debated the Indian National movement in various ways. In the present study we would make a brief sketch how they have debated the peasant struggle during the National Movement.

Imperialist historiography portrays peasants as noble, honest, exploited by the landlords, traders and money-lenders, respectful of authority, faithful to those in power who cared for and protected them. The agitators and troublemakers from among the Indian elite who intended to use them for their narrow political interests also easily mobilized them. Furthermore, the colonial administrators considered themselves as the protector of the peasants against the extortions of idle urban elite.

On the other hand the nationalists who have demonstrated the overall exploitative and underdeveloping character of colonialism, do consider that the peasants in colonial India were simple and ignorant, unaware of the fact that their poverty was the necessary outcome of the exploitative nature of the colonial rule. However, the problem is that the studies of Colonial and Nationalist idealizations of peasants were reductive, one dimensional and misleading.

---

9 Mukherjee, Mridula, "Peasant Resistance and Peasant Consciousness in Colonial India (Subaltern and Beyond)", *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 1988, p.2109.
10 Charterjee, Partha, "For an Indian History of Peasant Struggle", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 16, No. 11, November 1988, pp.5-6.
11 Ibid., p. 7.
12 Pinch, William, op.cit., p.4.
14 Charterjee, Partha, op.cit.,p.7.
15 Pinch, R. William, op.cit., p.5.
But it is to the broad Marxist approach or tradition that the vast majority of the writings on peasant resistance have tended to belong.\textsuperscript{16} To name a few of them A.R. Desai\textsuperscript{17} in his edited volume provides a view of tribal and peasant struggles in India during colonial period. He observes that the Indian peasants were not 'passive', 'fatalistic', 'docile' and 'unresisting'. In making such observations, Professor Desai was highly influenced by the findings of Kathleen Gough,\textsuperscript{18} who made a brief survey of 77 peasant movements in India spread over over two hundred years. She argued that the peasant and tribal uprisings mainly occurred in India in response to economic deprivation they faced under colonial rule. Besides, she has enumerated the class nature of the peasant and tribal movements. D.N. Dhanagare\textsuperscript{19} also has developed similar kinds of arguments while studying peasant revolts and resistance in India between 1920-50. Among the Marxist leaders and Marxist historians, the work of Namboodripad\textsuperscript{20} may be prominently mentioned. In his book and in various other writings on the subject he has presented beautifully the class analysis of these movements.

However, very recently, Ranjit Guha and his historian colleagues in India and abroad have enumerated an important approach to the study of tribal and peasant resistance, which has been broadly designated as subaltern historiography. Guha in his introductory essay defines the role of the politics of the 'people' as against that of the 'elite'. He considers all earlier historiography \textit{i.e.}, the neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist and also much of Marxist historiography as elite historiography which has always exaggerated the part elite has played in building Indian nationalism and

\textsuperscript{16} Mukhrjee, Mirdula, op.cit., p.S.
\textsuperscript{18} Gough, Kathleen, op.cit., p. 1391.
\textsuperscript{19} Dhnagare, D.N., \textit{Peasant Movement in India, 1920-50}, New Delhi, 1983 (See Introduction).
\textsuperscript{20} Namboodripad, E.M.S., \textit{A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala}, Bombay, 1943 (See Introduction).
has failed to recognize the contributions made by the people (masses) on their own, independently of the elite. In his view, there existed the two parallel streams of politics *i.e.*, 'elite politics' and 'people' or subaltern politics, which could not be integrated as a whole.\(^{21}\) He further argued that, during the colonial period of India, subaltern politics constituted an 'autonomous domain' which neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend upon the latter. He envisages that 'the people' or the subaltern classes and groups constituted the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in the town and country.\(^{22}\) In this context of colonial India, the elites consisted of European administrators, planters, landlords, and missionaries and of indigenous feudal segments, landholders, merchants and bureaucrats.\(^{23}\) Guha argued that the subaltern domain of politics and mode of thought and action was particularly expressed through rebellions, riots and popular movements. The elite domain of politics consisted during the colonial period of the arena created by the British through their laws, legislatures and other political society and the activities and organizations of formal political parties and movements, pre-eminently the Indian National Congress. Guha, however, does not see the two political domains operating as entirely separate; from time to time they overlap and interact but never become wholly integrated.\(^{24}\)

The subaltern approach has attracted considerable criticism. The view that subaltern protest movements were spontaneous and traditional and yet far more radical in their methods of resistance, sometimes even in their goals, than the elite on middle class dominated nationalist movement in India, has been questioned.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., pp.5-6.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 8.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., pp.5-6.
Secondly, the validity of the subalterns’ notion of ‘autonomous consciousness’ and ‘parallel political process’ have been questioned. It has been sorted out that this approach cannot grasp the relationship between the peasants and nationalism and the national movement.\(^{25}\) Thirdly, this approach lacks the precise meaning and scope of the concept of subalternity as an analytical category. Last but not the least; the subaltern studies approach confines itself preferentially to the colonial period, though not all the adherents strictly do so.\(^{26}\) Thus, these are historiography discourses that have existed in the contemporary academic settings to study the subaltern or more particularly the peasant and tribals political process during anti-imperialist mass movement in India.

Turning specifically to Orissa, and the subject of this study, it needs to be pointed out that very few studies are available. Among these, Biswomay Pati’s *Resisting Domination – Peasants, Tribals and National Movement in Orissa 1920-1950*, may be prominently mentioned.\(^{27}\) In this work the main focus of the author is to describe the process of ‘Hinduisation’ of tribals of Orissa during colonial period, which led to the narrowing down the gulf between the tribals and non-tribals, and thereby between coastal region and western interiors and, finally, between the common people and the middle class intellectuals. The author says that, perhaps no other factor contributed so heavily to this process as colonialism itself: the land settlements, growth of money-economy, and the peasantisation / Hinduisation of tribals. The author than studies the role of peasants and tribals in the national movement during the period 1920 – 1950. In this work he does not accept the views


of subaltern historians argument of 'duality of nationalism' (i.e., elite and subaltern nationalism) and 'popular autonomy'. However, the author accepts the specificity of the popular level and popular translations of swaraj, and illustrates the process of interaction, leading to the Congress and the national movement, both shaping and being shaped by the common people.

However there are certain weaknesses in Pati's work. The author initiated his argument with a discussion of the process of 'Hinduisation' of peasants/tribals of Orissa during the colonial period. The paradigms of modernization process through Hiduisation of peasants/tribals of Orissa may be used by the sociologists, but not so much by social historians, as it limits the scope of the political process.

Further in his discussion of the role of the peasants'/tribals' participation in the anti-colonial mass movements the role of the Congress seems marginal. This results from his refusal to recognize the centrality of the Congress in the political mobilization of the masses, including the peasants and the tribals.

The other limitations of his work is that, while from 1920 to 1936, the discussion is based on the whole province but after 1936, the author confines his discussion to the coastal tract (comprising the district of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore) and the five Princely States of Dhenkanal, Talcher, Nilgiri, Ranpur and Gangpur in a very generalised sense. In spite of certain limitations, the study of Dr. Pati, contributes in various ways to enrich our knowledge and understanding of the political process of peasants and tribals of Orissa during national movement.

The basic objective of the present research work is to fill the gaps and to evaluate the anti- landlord, anti-ruler and anti- moneylenders resistance of the peasants (includes tribals) within the broad spectrum of mass nationalist politics in
Chapter I

Orissa. Besides, as the present study deals with the period from c. 1921- c. 1950, therefore, it highlights the continuity and discontinuity of the peasant struggles in Orissa even after Independence, till 1950.

In the present study a humble attempt has been made to enquire into the subject from a historical perspective and then to make an analytical study of the Peasant Movement in Orissa c. 1920 - c.1950. Sources, both primary (official documents, reports, news papers, and private papers) and secondary - the works of social scientists (historians, sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists), biographical accounts and Oriya literature have been used. For the collection of the source materials, the State Archives of Orissa (Bhubaneswar), National Archives of India (New Delhi), and different libraries (States and National) have been immensely helpful.

SECTION II

The agrarian problem was perhaps the most important economic problem facing India during the British period. Agriculture constituted the main economic activity of the people -nearly eighty percent of the population depending on it for their livelihood. In case of Orissa, the proportion was more than eighty percent. It was the single largest sector of the economy and the mainstay of Oriya people. Rice was the most important crop throughout the province, 'Saradi' being the winter crop and 'Beali' the autumn crop.

---

After occupying Orissa in 1803, the British began to streamline their administration. By and large they retained the Mughal pattern by dividing the coastal region from the rest of Orissa. In the coastal areas of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore districts, initially, the British introduced a number of temporary land revenue settlements *i.e.*, they fixed the revenue on an annual or triennial basis. Among the early settlements were those of 1805 and 1837. The systematization of this was finally achieved through the settlement of 1897 and a Revision Settlement of 1927.

The land revenue measures of the colonial government during the nineteenth century ruined most of the old landowners *i.e.*, the Oriya proprietors and transferred their land to rich absentee Bengalis landlords and *Amalas* of the Courts. They resided in Bengal and prospered as absentee landlords by extracting revenue regularly. These absentee landlords were a swarm of vermin who thrived during this period. The landed aristocracy, thus created had detrimental socio-economic impact on the peasantry of Orissa and they could not withstand the competition of the Bengali speculators and the Amalas of the Courts. The colonial government was aware of the situation but very little was done to improve this. Thus, the

---

34 Toynbee, G. op.cit., p. 50.
landlords owned and controlled most of the land and the agrarian property during nineteenth century, which continued till twentieth century.  

The land revenue enhanced during this period raised from 14,314,825 in 1804-05 to 16,307,924 in 1818-19. Out of an area of 83,000 square miles, which comprised of British Orissa in the 1920s, 12,000 square miles was temporarily settled; 66,000 square miles was permanently settled; and 5,000 square miles was directly administered. Temporary settlements and rigid terms for the payment of revenue kisties led to the economic ruin of the peasantry.

Extracts from the reports of the local officers reveal the condition of the people during 19th century. In the words of Robert Kere, as cited by Monorama Mohapatra, "In this district the ryots are so exceedingly poor that most of them are bought and sold with the estates on which they live ......... their condition is oppressed and miserable." Mr. Ewer writes, "the indigent, miserable and depressed condition of the bulk of the agricultural population was occasioned chiefly by the constant fluctuation of the Governments assessments."

Besides these, the estates were frequently sold for a mere fraction of their real value and were almost invariably purchased by Bengalis and Amalas. The new landlords placed their kith and kins to collect the land revenue, who rack-rented the peasants. The revenue was also gradually

---

40 Mohapatra, Monarama, op.cit., p.172.
enhanced with the frequent changes of land revenue settlements without considering the paying capacity of the peasants.  

Before the British acquisition of Orissa, cowry currency was prevalent in the country. After the acquisition, the Commissioners entered into engagements with the Rajas and fixed the peshkush or revenue to be paid by them in sicca rupee. The landlords were to pay their revenues in rupees, and failing that in cowries. The introduction of sicca rupee in the place of cowry currency caused dissatisfaction among the peasants. The ryots used to pay their rents in cowries. Now this sudden change of currency system made their condition deplorable. Mr. Watson felt that the change of currency system was one of the causes of Paik Rebellion, 1817.

It was clear that the single and solitary aim which guided British land revenue policy in Orissa was the maximization of the land-revenue demand and collection except, of course, during the years of famine, when reduction of revenue rates became an economic necessity. Throughout the 19th and 20th century, the excessive growth in the land revenue demand was a definite and well set policy of the British Raj. Various sets of policies and plans were formulated from time to time to this end, i.e., the realization of the maximum revenue possible through quick and expeditious methods. As a consequence, the worst to suffer were the poor helpless peasants, in their thousands, who, while tilling the land and digging the soil, lived at the lowest rank of life amidst abject poverty and hunger.

---

41 Toynbee, G. op. cit., p.50.
We may now look at social stratification and social domination in the temporarily settled areas of Coastal Orissa. The zamindars came mostly from Brahmin, Karan and Kayastha castes in the proportion of 27, 22 and 28 percent respectively. They were a privileged lot, who, among other things, had special rights over forests and fisheries and could make profits from areas where cultivation was newly introduced.\textsuperscript{44}

Below them, there were the sub-proprietary tenure holders who were mostly Khandayats. They held hereditary tenures—and were not disturbed as long as they paid the rent (which they were supposed to collect) to the zamindars.\textsuperscript{45}

Then there were the holders of Lakhraj grants, the Bazyaftidars and Jagirdars, who held rent free lands. This category was mainly composed of Khandayats and Karanas though it included people from other castes.\textsuperscript{46}

During this period there were the two kinds of peasant—cultivators, namely, Thani-ryots (resident-cultivators) and Pahi-ryots (non resident ryots), mainly consisting of Khandayat and Chasa castes.\textsuperscript{47}

The thani-ryots enjoyed hereditary occupancy rights while the Pahi-ryots were legally tenants-at-will. However, as they(pahi-ryots) freely moved from village to village while the land-man ratio was favourable, they paid a far lower rate than the tenant attached permanently to the soil. The thani-ryots were exempted from paying rent for their house-sites. However,

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p.6.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p.6.
\textsuperscript{47} Chaudhury, Pradipta, “Peasants and British Rule in Orissa,” \textit{Social Scientists}, Vol. 19, No. 8&9, August and September 1991, p.31.
all extra impositions, legal and illegal, were levied upon the thani-ryots and were gradually consolidated with their rent. Since British rule the rent obligations of thani-ryots had risen to an oppressive height and in many instances absorbed almost the whole produce. The ryots were given absolutely no protection from illegal exactions by the zamindars. As a result, abwabs of all kinds were freely collected from the ryots, in addition to the high rent. Unable to cope with the oppressive demands of the proprietors, the thani-ryots of several taluk's deserted their village. Many of them, reduced to extreme poverty and misery, were forced to immigrate to the neighbouring states. Over-assessment of revenue and excessive exactions during the short term revenue settlements were principal causes of discontent, which even led to a popular rising, known as the Khurda uprising, against the British in 1817.

Next came the under-tenants and at the bottom the daily labourers (muliya and haliya). The daily labourers mainly consisted of untouchables and tribal peasants who did not have any land of their own to cultivate.

The upper sections with their feudal way of living could hardly generate enough surplus and develop the rural peasant economy. Marwari and Gujarati commercial capital which had acquired a dominating position by the early 20th century became a long-term handicap for the growth of local entrepreneurship. The economic condition of Orissa under colonialism did not show any improvement. The Royal Commission on Agriculture (1926) reported on the poverty, low standard of living, indebtedness of cultivators, increasing population of agricultural labourers and poor

---

48 Ibid., pp.31-32.
49 Pati, Biswamoy, op. cit., p.6.
economic condition of the common man in Orissa. The agrarian “structure in colonial Orissa was feudal and semi-feudal”, although peasant proprietorship also constituted a sizeable segment of the agrarian economy.  

As J.K. Mohapatra & U.M. Das remark, “the rural economic stratification of Orissa was largely determined by size of holding, tenancy status and caste composition. However, they had a common identity based on land use, mostly tied to each other in a complex sort of exploitative tenancy relationship, constraining efficiency in land use practices, perpetuating low productivity and agricultural backwardness.” The Southern portion of Orissa i.e., Ganjam and Koraput districts were administered as a part of Madras Presidency till the amalgamation with Orissa in 1936.  

The Madras Land Law, a different land revenue system, was enforced in Ganjam and Koraput Districts of Orissa, which was entirely different from that of North Orissa. The district of Sambalpur was under the Central Provinces Tenancy Act. The same tenancy law was continued even when Sambalpur was amalgamated to Orissa province in 1936. After Sambalpur was transferred to Bihar and Orissa, the Central Provinces Tenancy Act underwent some amendments, but no corresponding amendments were made by the Bihar and Orissa Government, with the result that the Act was applicable in the main portion of the Sambalpur district.

---

51 Ibid., p.294.  
52 Mohanty, Monaranjan, op. cit., p.330  
The district of Sambalpur was first brought under settlement in 1850 for a period of 3 years, which was renewed until the end of 1858. The next settlement started in 1862-63. Such short term settlements proved harmful to the ryots, who could not invest in land with the aim of increasing productivity, because in the context of increasing revenue, the ryots (tenants) faced the threat of eviction from their land by the Gountias (village headmen) and the zamindars. The sources of income of the zamindars included land revenue, forest dues, bazar dues, nazrana and pandhari-tax. A little more than two-thirds of the land revenue and half of the sources of income were left to the zamindars. The Gountias held land free of rent, equivalent to an area yielding a maximum of 25 percent of the revenue of the village, besides bethi and begar, were equally powerful. Thus, the Gountias and zamindars enjoyed wide socio-economic power and exploited the peasantry in the Sambalpur district.\footnote{Baboo, Balgovind, “The Economic History of Sambalpur District, 1849-1947: An Introduction,” Social Scientist, Vol. 16, No’s 6 & 7, June-July, 1988, pp. 26-27.}

In addition to the high land revenue demand, the timing of collection and amount was inelastic in Orissa during colonial rule. In a year revenue had to be paid in two installments of equal size, falling on 28 April and 8 November. The timing of collection of rent were adjusted accordingly by the zamindars, with half of the total annual payments of ryots collected before the April kist day and the rest by the November kist day. The payment of half of the annual revenue rent before 8 November kist day. The payment of half of the annual rent before 8 November caused serious inconvenience to the cultivators. The peasantry almost entirely depended on the winter rice crop, the earliest variety of which could be reaped only in November. The
vast majority of cultivators had no savings. Hence, to pay rent in time the ryots as a rule were forced to borrow cash on an exorbitant rate of interest, usually 20 percent, for two months.

The economic depression during 1842-55 also greatly impoverished the peasantry as the prices of the agricultural products fell. It caused more harm to the thani-ryots since they were already paying an oppressive rent. During the period of low prices, their rent generally accounted for the entire produce, and sometimes more, creating unprecedented economic burden on the peasantry forcing them to borrow money from the moneylenders.56

From 1856 the economic condition of Orissa began improving, but it was struck by the great famine of 1866, which resulted in insurmountable misery to the agriculturists and reduced the total population by about 35 to 40 percent. The peasantry sold their movable assets and land to the zamindars and moneylenders for grain loans and finally were evicted when they failed to pay the rent. This also resulted in a process of indebtedness encompassing very large number of small peasants who came to crucially depend upon the village moneylenders, zamindars and rich peasants for credit.57

During the colonial period, there were also instances of damage to crops through cyclones and floods. In many parts of British Orissa, as well as in the princely states of Orissa, the income of peasants tended to diminish with the declining productivity of land and shrinkage in cultivation caused by the impaired river system, floods, extensive rural depopulation and

56 Chaudhury, Pradipta, op. cit., p.33.
57 Ibid., pp.34-36.
enhanced rents through imposition of abwabs. Therefore the peasants borrowed money from the village moneylenders on high rate of interest. However, debts were incurred by peasants mainly for: (1) payment of rent to the zamindars and land revenue to the government; (2) payment of old debts and interest; (3) maintenance of the family until the next harvest; (4) social functions and obligations; and purchase of agricultural stock such as seeds, cattle and implements.\textsuperscript{58}

The Bengali tahashildars (tax collectors), amalas, sheristadrs (revenue farmers) and salt darogahs also lent money to the proprietors, malangies and ryots. Besides, there were some creditor groups, such as Kabulis, Marwaris, Gossains and Punjabis who were generally covered by the term Maghea (upcountry merchants) who used to lend money in the off season to realize the demands at harvesting season in the month of Magh (February-March). They constituted only one percent of the whole rural credit system. In Orissa, after 1821, the credit agency was predominantly local and constituted of the affluent ryots and zamindars, and the money lending system held the key position in the rural credit system.

The rates of interest on grain and money loans varied from place to place in Orissa. The role of the village moneylenders in the peasant economy of Orissa was indispensable for agricultural operations. The money lending operations within the peasant economy set in motion the broader outflow of resources from Orissa to Bengal, and ultimately from India to England. Orissa thus became an appendage of the colonial economy as a source of raw materials and a base for alien industrial capital.

The money lending system in Orissa was such that it was almost impossible for the peasants to get out of the clutches of moneylenders. As a result, the peasants were gradually degraded into a class of dependent peasantry and thus were exploited in various ways by the moneylenders.\(^{59}\)

The relationship between the landlords and tenants was strained during the period under review. The landlords collected number of illegal cesses known as "abwabs" in addition to their usual land revenue. This put serious financial burden on the ryots. Although the Orissa Tenancy Act was passed in 1913 and was amended in 1928, it could not protect the interests of the peasants.\(^{60}\)

Next to agriculture, salt manufacture was one of the chief occupations of the rural people living in the sea shore areas. After meeting the demand of the home market a large quantity of salt was exported outside the province during the Maratha period and the profit of the salt enjoyed by the manufacturers.\(^{61}\)

However the introduction of salt monopoly after the occupation of the British increased the pressure on agriculture and it created unemployment. Increased pressure on land led to overcrowding and fragmentation of holdings into un-economic sizes. This resulted in stagnation of agriculture and pressure on peasantry.\(^{62}\)

---

59 Ibid., pp.41-45.
As has been stated earlier the coastal Orissa was also frequently ravaged by natural calamities such as drought, famines, floods etc. The most severe famine was in 1866, which ruined the backbone of the peasantry. The callous officers, greedy mahajans and selfish zamindars were partly responsible.\(^{63}\) During 1919-20, 1925-26, and 1927-28, there were heavy floods causing extensive damage of standing crops. Although repeated demands were made in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, no remission of revenue was granted.\(^{64}\)

In Orissa, no significant or elaborate irrigation network was undertaken to improve the agricultural conditions either by the colonial government or by the zamindars during this period.\(^{65}\) Agriculture was highly dependent on rainfall. The normal rainfall was above 60" per annum. But from 1860’s a relatively elaborate network of irrigation canals was constructed in the Mahanadi Delta to help the Kharif crops. There was marked demand of irrigated canal water towards the close of the 19\(^{th}\) century due to low rainfall. Although irrigation directly contributed to reclamation of land in some areas, the extension of cultivation in the un-irrigated tracts was no more than that in the unrelated tracts, between 1837 and 1897. Besides, the availability of canal irrigation failed to contribute the possibilities of multiple cropping, change in cropping pattern in favour of valuable crops, and increase in productivity. This was because the canals, like the rivers in Orissa, generally did not contain much water during Rabi season. Consequently, their ability to provide irrigation during Rabi season

\(^{63}\) Mukherjee, P. *History of Orissa*, Utkal University, 1964, p.396.
\(^{64}\) Kar, A.K. op.cit., p.387.
\(^{65}\) Chaudhury, Pradipta, op. cit., p.37.
was severely limited, because of which the contribution of canals to double cropping was marginal.\textsuperscript{66}

Although irrigation was undertaken during the British period, the water rates were Rs/- 3 per acre for a single crop and Rs/- 5 per acre per annum for double crop. Given the limited benefits of irrigation, the price of water was considered too high. The peasants, already facing an oppressive rent burden, did not show much enthusiasm for the irrigation water. However, the government was primarily interested in maximizing the revenue from irrigation. Therefore, the Government forcibly supplied canal water to the fields, often causing damage to the standing crops. The cultivators were also compelled sometimes physically, to execute leases under the threat that they would otherwise be charged for illicit irrigation tax at the rate of Rs/- 6 per acre. In some cases, water rate was levied on high lands where canal water could not reach, at other times villagers having no land for cultivating were made to pay water cess.

The most important factor which significantly cut into the benefits of irrigation to the peasants was the collection of bribes by the subordinate staff of the Canal Department. The \textit{Amins} who came to measure the irrigated lands demanded bribes, and threatened that they would otherwise increase the assessed area. Likewise, the \textit{Ijrads}, \textit{Mohurirs} and \textit{Khalsas} demanded and received bribes in kind and cash, using various threats. If the ryots resisted such payments they were in trouble. Besides, the major portion of the benefits of irrigation was appropriated by the landlords. Thus, the irrigation canals during British rule had become a source of oppression and

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., pp.40-41.
exploitation of the peasants and it had a very limited impact on productivity and cropping pattern.\textsuperscript{67}

Turning to the princely states, when the British occupied Orissa, these were twenty-nine in number.\textsuperscript{68} But during the twentieth century, Orissa had twenty-four dependent territories attached to it.\textsuperscript{69} For political expediency and economic considerations, the colonial government kept the princely states, separated from Coastal Orissa.\textsuperscript{70} The chiefs of the princely states entered into an agreement with the colonial government and they agreed to give tribute on a fixed basis. In return the colonial government assured liberal treatment to the Raja’s.\textsuperscript{71} The Rajas generally administered their States in accordance with the provision of their ‘Sanads’, which defined their status, power and position. In case of failure of administration, the colonial government appointed a superintendent to oversee the administration.\textsuperscript{72}

The Rajas of the princely states enjoyed wide powers in comparison with the neighbouring states where the British laws and regulations were applicable. The British government, by allowing such privileges, did not want to interfere in the internal administration of princely states, which were governed by their local traditions and laws. While administrative development in other parts of the state followed a general pattern, the

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., pp.42-43.
princely states were left to suffer their own indigenous systems. Though the local officers repeatedly represented to the higher authorities for the extension of British laws and regulations to the princely states, the British government firmly and systematically opposed such a policy. No definite and systematic rules were adopted for the administration of those states. The interference was mostly confined to matters of a political nature; to the suppression of feuds and animosities prevailing between the Rajas of adjoining states or between Rajas and their subordinate feudatories; to check the systematic oppression or cruelty practised by any of the chiefs or by their officers; or matters which could lead to violent and general outrage and confusion.\textsuperscript{73}

British revenue policy in the princely states was different from that in the province. Though the amount of revenue was not fixed on equal principles, they followed a settled policy with the rulers of princely states.\textsuperscript{74}

The agrarian conditions of these states were more or less similar to coastal Orissa. Rice was the staple crop and was entirely dependent on seasonal rainfall. The peasantry carried on the states most primitive type of cultivation. Regular survey and settlement was rare in the States. Canals and embankments on any large scale were unknown.\textsuperscript{75}

The princely states of Orissa were ravaged by severe famine. Though the intensity of the great famine was less in princely states however, in

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p.405.
\textsuperscript{75} Ramsay, Cobdden, op.cit., pp. 72, 74 & 79.
1897, 1900 and 1908, some of the states suffered from considerable scarcity.\textsuperscript{76}

The system of land revenue was simple and somewhat homogenous throughout the princely states of Orissa. The ownership of the lands by and large lay with the state, but the right of occupancy rested with the tenants. However, the land was rented out to the ryots and remained in his possession undisturbed as long as he paid his rent. Generally, the transfer of holdings, through sale, gift, mortgage or by any other method was not allowed.\textsuperscript{77}

The system of taxation that prevailed in these states defied all canons of finance. Land was heavily taxed without regard to the capacity of the peasants to pay. No scientific principles of land revenue assessment were observed by the rulers of these states. Land revenue in British India was considered to be high enough and there was widespread demand for its substantial reduction. But the same in the states was higher still.\textsuperscript{78}

The Orissa States Enquiry Committee of 1937, reported the following rate of rents in the States:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the States</th>
<th>Rate of Rents Per Acre Highest Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tigiria</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keonjhar</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narasinghapur</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangpur</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dasapalla</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p. 78.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Report of the State Inquiry Committee, Orissa State, 1937}, Cuttack 1939, p. 8.
Chapter I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>1st Year</th>
<th>2nd Year</th>
<th>3rd Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baramba</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayurbhanj</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pallahara</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nilgiri</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharswan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayagarh</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patna</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athagarh</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sareikala</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khandapara</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindol</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamra</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athamalik</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhenkanal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talcher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranpur</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0 (double crop)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Added to this, there were numerous other illegal *cesses or abwabs* such as grazing cess, industrial cess, sugarcane cess, tax on landless labourers, fruit cess, merchandise cess, fees for adoption, *salami* for permitting widows to adopt, income tax, salt tax, kerosene, bidi, tabacco, pan, coconut, coir, meat cesses and many other cesses on articles and daily necessities of life, through monopoly. In some states, special fees for permitting use of plank doors, use of any head dress, use of palanquins, tax on plough and many other taxes had been levied.80

Besides these illegal cesses, *bethi* (forced labour), *rasad* (forced requisition of provisions), *magan* (forced requisition of money on

---

79 Ibid., pp. 9.
80 Ibid., p. 10.
ceremonial occasions), *suniya bheti* (new year presents) were illegally practiced.\(^81\)

The system of state monopoly on the daily necessities of life, such as salt, kerosene, pan and coconut *etc.*, hit the tenants hard. The increased prices of these commodities encouraged sale of inferior stuff and set diminishing returns in motion with the consequent fall in the consumption of the articles concerned.\(^82\)

In a poverty-stricken area, which did not have other sources of income except land, this heavy and iniquitous burden had broken the backbone of the peasantry.\(^83\)

The relationship which existed between the rulers of the states and tenants, was one of *Ma-Bap* (mother-father). The rulers on account of the education they received and the behavior that was expected of them by the paramount power had lost touch with the people. The only training that the rulers got in the twentieth century was how to mix freely with the Europeans and to vie with one another in winning the favour of the political officers.\(^84\) Thus, the relationship between the zamindars and the peasantry on the whole was not cordial.

Coming to the social stratification in the states of Orissa, at the top there was the British Government, followed by the Rajas. In the of Orissa, Bhuiyans, Kharias, Kultha, Kolta Chasa (Haliya), Savaras, Gonds and Konds (aboriginal tribal peasants) were mainly the peasant communities and the

---

\(^{81}\) Ibid., pp. 15-17.  
\(^{82}\) Ibid., p. 10.  
\(^{83}\) Ibid., p. 10.  
\(^{84}\) Ibid., p. 22.
Brahmins and dominated the entire rural agrarian social structure and the rural peasant economy.\(^8^5\)

In the of Orissa next to the Ruling Chiefs the village headman, known as the Padhan, Sabarkar, Thekadar, Goantia or Ganjhan, occupied a key place. They served as the only link between the state and the tenants. The headman used to remain in charge of rent collection and discharge all other duties with respect to the management of the village. It was during the British period that the system of village headmanship was retained throughout the states of the agency with some minor modifications. The headman got some land assigned as remuneration, known as Bhogra (rent free land).\(^8^6\)

The social and political status of the Gountia (Kulta/ Brahmin) was fairly high in the village. He functioned as a landlord in relation to the ryots and was a representative of the state for collection of land revenue. During colonial rule, the Gountias acquired the power to evict defaulting tenants, the right to distribute wasteland and also to mediate in transfer of ryotwari land. The Gountias were traditionally entitled to demand unpaid labour or bethi from the ryots. At the bottom of the social hierarchy, there were the landless labourers who were mostly from the depressed castes.\(^8^7\) The post-famine developments increased the number of small landowners. The


\(^8^7\) Mohanty, Monaranjan, op. cit., p.332.
tenants, landless labourers and artisans became dependent on more well to do landowners in the village for loans.\textsuperscript{88}

Thus, while the zamindars dominated the entire agrarian society in Coastal Orissa, the Rajas and \textit{Gountias} dominated the entire agrarian structure in most of the of Orissa. In the princely states, the Rajas performed the role under the paramount rule of the British, who intervened mainly to quell the peasants’ agitations.\textsuperscript{89}

Since the British occupation of Orissa, the agrarian constraints led to the rise of popular movements in various parts of Orissa. The risings were primarily anti-feudal and anti-British in nature. Among these popular movements one of the most important was the Khurda Paik Rebellion of 1817. It was a popular revolt against the British oppressive policies. In the princely states of Orissa, the popular uprisings may be understood in the background of British relations with the ruling chiefs. The nature of these risings varied from place to place, but they were predominately anti-British, anti-feudal and agrarian risings. The Ghumsar rising of 1835-37, the Kond rising of 1837-56 and the Sambalpur rising of 1857-64 were primarily anti-British in nature, whereas the Keonjhar rising of 1867-68 and 1891-93, the Nayagarh rising of 1849-52 and 1893-94 were primarily anti-feudal in nature. Considering the nature of the popular revolts it may be said that the British authorities failed to understand the problems in different parts of Orissa. Consequently, whatever steps were taken by the British authorities, they only touched the fringe of the problem. The tone of the administration did not improve much and there was a continuous smoldering discontent in

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 336.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p. 336.
the nineteenth century. It finally led to the rise of national consciousness among the people of the British areas and princely states of Orissa.\textsuperscript{90}

In Orissa, as elsewhere in India in 19\textsuperscript{th} century, popular peasant consciousness were felicitated mainly due to two factors; first, the rise of middle class intellectuals, and secondly, the growth of propagation media like local press, \textit{etc.} The establishment of the English-medium schools, colleges and universities spread the western ideas and thoughts. It slowly and steadily led to the emergence of a new class of intelligentsia with noble hopes and aspirations. The growth of railways, postal services and press, both native and English provided the required propagation media for giving necessary fillip to popular movements.\textsuperscript{91}

Here an attempt has been made to sketch briefly the growth of education and development of press in Orissa in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century to understand the rise of socio-political movements in this part of the country.

As far as the progress of education in British Orissa the Christian missionaries took the initiative. However, in 1838, the British government opened an English and a Sanskrit School at Puri. In 1841 a Higher Class English School was opened at Cuttack, which proved to be the principal seat of learning in the province.\textsuperscript{92} The spread of education though slow, led to the emergence of an enlightened and educated minority which formed the

\textsuperscript{90} Mishra, P.K., \textit{Political Unrest in Orissa in the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, Anti-British, Anti-Feudal and Agrarian Risings}, Calcutta, pp.189-193.

\textsuperscript{91} Patra, K.M., "Growth of Social Consciousness in Orissa in the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century", \textit{Indian History Record Commission}, Vol. XL., Madras, 1970, P.144.

\textsuperscript{92} Gosh, Sarat Chandra, \textit{Orissa Studies} (part-1), Cuttack, 1935, p.87.
‘hardcore’ of the socio-political movements in Orissa during last decades of the 19th century. 93

Madhusudan Das was the first graduate of Orissa. He was among the early nationalists, who took up the problems of agrarian relations in Orissa. 94 He was the earliest strident voice raised for the abolition of zamindari system, which, according to him, was alien to Indian tradition. At a time when the Orissa Tenancy Bill was on the legislative anvil in the Bengal Council in 1911, he opposed the bill both in the council and in the press. Madhusudan Das pleaded eloquently and effectively for the Oriya ryots to get a fair deal. 95 The growth of press occurred during the second half of the 19th century. The paper which moulded popular opinion and ventilated peoples’ feelings was the Utkal Dipika (1866) edited by Gaurishankar Ray, a champion of socio-political reforms. In 1868, another important journal of Orissa, Bodha-Dayinee and Balasore Sambad Bahika came out from Balasore Utkal Press. On May 30, 1889, Sambalpur Hitaishini was published from Bamra, which gave expression to public opinion and moulded the views in the of Orissa. Some other journals and periodicals, which expressed the nascent socio-political consciousness and made efforts to ventilate the needs of the masses during the 19th century were, as follows; Cuttack Argus (1869), Cuttack Star (1869), Utkal Hitaishini (1869), Cuttack Standard (1869), Utkal Darpan (1873), Utkal Putra (1873), Utkal Samskark (1874), Utkal Madhupa (1878), Sebaka (1883), Pradipa (1885), Oriya

94 Mishra, Amal Kumar, op. cit., p.68.
95 Mohanty, Surendra, Madhusudan Das, New Delhi, 1972, pp.75-80, (reprint-1999).
Nabasambad (1888), Oriya Patriot (1888), Utkal Prava (1891), Ganjam News (1896), and Orissa Times (1898).  

Besides, the emergence of public associations greatly contributed to popular consciousness in Orissa. The first such organization was the Mutual Improvement Society at Cuttack (1859), Cuttack Debating Club (1869), Cuttack Young Men’s Association (1869), Utkal Brahmo Samaj (1869), Puri Society (1870), Utkal Bhaga Uddipani Sabha (1873), Bhadrak Desha Hitaisini Sabha (1874), Ganjam Nashua Nishedhini Sabha (1875), Orissa Islam Association (1875), Balasore National Society (1878), Dhenkanal Hitaisini Sabha (1881), Utkal Sabha (1882), Orissa Peoples Association (1882), Anti-Corruption and Prohibition Sabha (1884), Orissa Graduate and Under Graduate Association (1888), Utkal Sammileni (1889), Kayastha Sabha (1889-90), B. Dey’s Social Club at Balasore (1895), and Orissa Christian Association (1896). Most of these organizations, although short-lived, prepared the ground for bigger movements in the next century. 

The year 1903 constituted an important landmark in the annals of Orissa. The year witnessed a new dawn in Orissa politics, i.e., the agitation for unification of Oriya-speaking tracts under one administration, popularly known as Oriya movement. A new organization called the Utkal Union Conference was set up in the same year for the purpose of organising agitation for unification. 

97 Ibid., p. 151. 
The first session of the Utkal Union Conference was held at Cuttack Town Hall from 30th to 31st December 1903, under the Chairmanship of the 'Kulabrudha' (Grand old man), Madhusudan Das, and aimed at the unification of dismembered Oriya tracts. From 1903 to 1920 the Utkal Union Conference dominated the political scene of Orissa. With the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics, the atmosphere was surcharged with new zeal and popular enthusiasm for national movement which swept away all local politics and merged them in the broad current of national struggle. Orissa too was enthused with the new spirit of Indian nationalism with Gopabandhu Das as the frontline leader. It was under the leadership of Gopabandhu Das that the Utkal Pradesh Committee came into being in 1921, which stirred popular enthusiasm in Orissa.

In the 1920s, Gopabandhu Das, who had deep sympathy towards the cause of the poor, provided leadership to and focused on the agrarian difficulties of the peasantry in the colonial Orissa. This concern was reflected in his efforts to organize a no-rent campaign in Puri, as it was exposed to a severe famine in 1921. The Government panicked and served an order under section 144 directing him not to enter the Banki area of Puri district. Besides, it was during the Non-Cooperation Movement that he raised his voice against the Raja of Kanika, who oppressed the peasantry. Ghastly stories of oppression in Kanika were published in the columns of Samaj, of which Gopabandhu Das was the editor. The Raja of Kanika started

99 Utkal Union Conference (A Report), Acc. No. 1600, Orissa State Archives, Bhubaneswar, Orissa.
a number of defamation cases against the editor. He was also served with a notice not to enter and hold any meeting in the Kanika area. Finally, he was arrested during the Non-Cooperation Movement.

It was towards the close of the 1920s that other Congress nationalists, such as Gopabandhu Das, Jagabandhu Singh, Bhagabat Prasad Chaudhuri advocated the peasant problems in Orissa. They advocated that reform and a change in the nature of remission in the land revenue demand were merely as a palliatives, than as a permanent remedy to the problem. The Congress nationalists viewed, that, fixing the land-revenue in perpetuity, i.e., a permanent settlement for Orissa is a long-term solution.

British Orissa suffered a series of floods from 1926-28 and the condition of the peasants became miserable. Jagabandhu Singh moved a resolution in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council that land rent should not be enhanced and demanded remission of land rents. However the demand was put aside. This was the situation when the historic Salt Satyagraha began in Orissa. There was unbounded popular enthusiasm for the Satyagraha. When Hare Krishna Mahatab and other Congressmen broke the salt law at Inchudi, thousands of local people came and joined in the movement. The Congress Movement of Salt Satyagraha in Orissa achieved a remarkable success in 1930. About five thousand Salt Satyagrahis or more courted imprisonment, reflecting popular peasant enthusiasm in Orissa.

---

103 Mishra, Amal Kumar, op. cit., p.70.
104 The Revision Settlement of Orissa (1922-32), Patna 1934, pp. 5 -13.
105 Mishra, Amal Kumar, pp. cit., p.71.
106 Hunter, W.W., op. cit., p. 400.
Nationalist leaders in Orissa, did not come out strongly either in favour of a permanent settlement or for some other measure, i.e., a better short term or temporary settlement. The reason was that, the nationalists in Orissa who were also Congress members, now had come under the bigger spell of Indian National Congress and accordingly, they were involved in the day to day struggle for national independence right after the Civil Disobedience Movement. On the other hand, the Congress Socialist Party of Orissa, which came into being in 1934 under the aegis of Surendranath Dwivedy, made earnest efforts to organize the peasants of Orissa to save them from the tyranny and oppression of landlords of British Orissa and Rulers of. Naturally the peasant leadership passed into the hands of the Congress Socialists. The Congress Socialist Party of Orissa undertook to organize Krushak Sangh throughout the province of Orissa. Finally, with the efforts of the congress socialists the Utkal Pradesh Krushak Sangh (Utkal Provincial Kisan Sabha) was set up in June 1935 with Hare Krishna Mahatab as its president. From 1935 to 1937 a number of peasant meetings were held by the Krushak Sangh in different parts of Orissa to resist the unjust exactions by the zamindars. The Congress Socialist Party of Orissa as well as the Krushak Sangh which came to power after the election of 1936, demanded that the Congress Ministry bring about agrarian reform measures to ameliorate the condition of the peasantry of Orissa. The Congress Ministry, in keeping the election manifesto and the demand of the

107 Mishra, Amal Kumar, op.cit., p.70.
108 Dwivedy, Surendra Nath, Quest for Socialism: Fifty years of struggle in India, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 36-53.
Chapter I

Congress Socialists, brought about a number of agrarian legislative measures.\textsuperscript{111}

In the of Orissa, the peasant consciousness developed more rapidly when the Orissa State Peoples Conference was held at Cuttack in 1931, under the leadership of Bhubanananda Das. In this meeting an appeal was made to the ruling chiefs of Orissa for better administration and abolition of evil system of \textit{bethi} and \textit{begar} from the States. In 1934, the Prajamandal movement was started in the princely states of Orissa. It fought vehemently against the oppression of the peasants by the ruling chiefs. Meetings and protest demonstrations were organized in various parts of the of Orissa under the banner of respective Prajamandals.\textsuperscript{112}

In 1939 the World War-II began. The adverse economic situation in Orissa which emerged from the war convinced the rural peasantry that British colonialism was the root cause of the trouble.\textsuperscript{113} The Krushak Sangh, the Communist Party of Orissa (1938) and the Congress Socialist Party organized peasants throughout Orissa for demanding economic redressal. The Congress on the other hand started anti-war propaganda and made preparation for the future struggle. Finally, as per the decision of the Indian National Congress, the Congress Ministry in Orissa resigned in 1939. In this situation the colonial administration launched an offensive against the Krushak Sangh. Its offices were raided and its activists were arrested. The

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\end{thebibliography}
Chapter I

Congress emphasis was on the possibility of a mass movement in the future.¹¹⁴

The August Movement started in 1942. Orissa witnessed an unprecedented mass rising and the jails were over-crowded with thousands of her heroic patriots while many of them gave their life, facing the firing and lathi charges. In the district of Koraput alone, about ten thousand persons were arrested, two persons including a boy of four years were murdered in lathi charges, twenty-five lost their lives in firing, fifty died of torture in jail, thirty-two were transported for life and one Lakshman Naiko mounted the gallows.¹¹⁵

There was mass participation of peasants in Orissa during the Quit India Movement. Peasants were asked to seize the lands of the Rajas and zamindars forcibly and resort to non-payment of rent, cutting forests and manufacturing salt. Thus, the Quit India movement of 1942 was a remarkable success in Orissa.¹¹⁶

After the end of the Quit India Movement, British Orissa suffered from a terrible famine which created a grave food crisis. Taking advantage of this situation the Krushak Sangh and the left wing Communists tried to renew their contact with the peasants. The Congress on the other hand tried to counter the influence of the Krushak Sangh as well as that of the Communists.¹¹⁷ Although the Congress attempted to undermine the Krushak Sangh in British Orissa and the Prajamandal in the princely states, it was

---

¹¹⁵ Hunter, W.W., op.cit., p.401.
¹¹⁶ De, Sushil Chandra, op. cit., p. 35.
with the support of the Communists, both the organisations remained active and mobilised the peasantry.\textsuperscript{118}

In 1945, both the international and national situation changed considerably and the Congress leaders were released. The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, decided that elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures would be held in the winter of 1945-46, following which the Constituent Assembly would be summoned to frame India's new constitution. In the elections the Congress was victorious and formed the ministry in April 1946, with Hare Krushna Mahatab as the Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{119} After the Congress Ministry was installed in Orissa, it introduced the Madras Estates Land Bill, 1947 to redress the grievances of the peasants of Ganjam. In order to help the peasants, the Congress Ministry passed certain bills such as, Agricultural Income Tax (1946) Sales Tax (1946) and Orissa Money Lenders Bill (1947).\textsuperscript{120}

Towards the close of 1946, there was huge peasant protest throughout the province for the abolition of zamindari system. Following the instructions of the Congress Working Committee, the Mahatab Ministry appointed the Zamindari Abolition Committee. But the Congress faced a real problem in pushing for zamindari abolition as a large number of zamindars of Orissa had extended their support to the Congress candidates during the election.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{118} Pati, Biswamoy, op. cit., pp.
\textsuperscript{119} Hunter, W.W., op.cit., p.401.
\textsuperscript{120} Patra, K.M., op. cit., pp.248-254.
\textsuperscript{121} Nabeena (Oriya Weekly), dated 31st August, 1948.
On 15th August, 1947, India observed Independence Day. It was celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm throughout the province. The popular enthusiasm on the occasion was naturally spontaneous and very high. However, a bitter relationship continued to exist between the Rajas, landlords, money-lenders and peasants in all parts of Orissa. The most important reason was the non-abolition of zamindari system in Orissa.\textsuperscript{122}

In 1947 the Krushak Sangh started the sharecroppers’ movement in the districts of Puri, Cuttack, Ganjam and Balasore. By November 1947 it reached serious proportions. Besides, the Krushak Sangh staged protest demonstrations in various parts of Orissa for the abolition of zamindari system, restoration of ownership of lands to the tenants and amalgamation of princely states with Orissa province. The Congress Ministry enacted the Share Croppers Act in 1947.\textsuperscript{123} For the abolition of zamindari system, the Orissa Estates Abolition Act was passed in 1952,\textsuperscript{124} which resulted in statutory abolition of intermediaries between the cultivators and the state. Secondly, certain categories of cultivators were granted permanent and hereditary rights in land for the first time and thirdly, burden of feudal illegal exactions was eliminated. \textit{Bethi} (forced labor), \textit{begar} (unpaid labour), \textit{nazrana}, \textit{bheti} and sixty-four other kinds of feudal taxes which generally existed in the of Orissa were abolished along with abolition of landlordism. It marked the greatest triumph of the popular peasant protest in Orissa.\textsuperscript{125}

With the advent of independence, a popular upsurge also took place in the various states of Orissa to demand civil liberties as enjoyed in the neighbouring

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{122} Pati, Biswamoy, \textit{op.cit.}, p.224.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Bailey, F.G., \textit{Politics and Social Change (Orissa in 1959)\textit{, Berkeley, 1963, p.191.}}
\item \textsuperscript{124} \textit{Report of the Chief Ministers Conference on Land Reforms, New Delhi, 1969, p. 42.}
\item \textsuperscript{125} Mohapatra, J.K. & Urmi Mala Das, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 303.
\end{itemize}
province of Orissa and integration of the princely states with Orissa province. Hare Krushna Mahatab, the Premier of Orissa, initiated the integration of princely states of Orissa. It was in December 1947 that twenty-five states out of twenty-six states agreed with the "Merger Plan", and signed the "Instrument of Accession" with the Government of India at Cuttack. Mayurbhanj was the only state which did not accept the Merger Plan till 1949. The integration of the of Orissa was a day of rejoicing for the masses of Orissa. Thus, the popular peasant uprising in Orissa during the national movement finally broke the shackles of imperial bondage and furthered the process of nation building.