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Study of Kisan Movement in India

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The local Congress was forced to abandon some of its chosen centres for the salt satyagraha' and the campaign was replaced by their decision to lay more emphasis on economic issue. Intelligence reports say, 'small parties' moving about the province advised cultivators 'to refuse to pay any enhancement of rent ... because many of these enhancements are illegal'. Kalka Prasad, a member of the Rae Bareli District Congress Committee, spreading 'no-rent' propaganda coupled with promises of smaller rents under Swaraj.

In Muttra district too, suppression against 'villagers' was conducted by local police authority. But what makes the suppression decisively different from other districts of eastern part of the province was that it was directed against strong solidarity among all sections of people nurtured by the Congress. Such solidarity could become serious threat for the authority. The UPCC report explains why the suppression of the authority was so serious as follows: This fact is still more clearly understood, if one were to know that practically there is no trouble between the zemindars and the tenants in the district. 'There is no question of non-payment of rent or incitement thereto. Even in the prosecutions launched, there is no allegation against any Congress worker about any such trouble:18 Therefore the suppression by means of violence and legal prosecution against 'villagers' was aimed at rooting out the Congress organization and preventing it from consolidating its rural base during the truce period of Gandhi-Irwin Pact.' On the other hand, eastern districts of the province have seen the prevalence of tenant-oriented economic propaganda and many cases of landlord-tenants disputes increasing after the October resolution. In fact, it was after the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement by Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March, 1931, that dispute between landlords and tenants became more intense. Major Congress leaders continued to deliver ambiguous addresses regarding rent at number of meetings, such as 'only if they can' or 'pay only 4, 6 or 8 annas in the rupee', or 'only if zamindars give receipts'. The local leaders often advocated more openly the total non-payment of rent.49 But tenants' attempts of not paying rent were everywhere compelled to face fierce opposition from landlords supported by local authorities.

A report of inquiry conducted 47 Agrarian Distress, pp. 182'9. 48 Ibid, p. 187. 49 D. O. No. 1875/S. '1' .. from the CoHector Allahabad District, to the Commissioner, Allahabad Division, dated 17th March. 1931, File No. 31 of 1931, UPSA; From the Chief Secretary, Govt. U. P. To H. W. Emerson. Secretary to the Govt. Of India, Home, dated 25th March, File No. 32/11/1931, Home (Political). NAI. 169 by UPCC revealed number of landlords' atrocities against tenants. Landlords in this area appeared to identify tenants invariably with Congress workers or its sympathisers, and vice versa. They thought that all the local Congress workers-cum-tenants were preaching anti-landlord propaganda and obstructing the realization of rent. In those atrocities, which shall be examined below, therefore, being Congl-ess workers as well as non-payment of rent became targets to be attacked by landlords and his agents. The report also suggested many tenants being in quite oppressed condition, where remissions granted by the Government were made to be ineffectual and further illegal cesses were imposed on them by their landlords. Bara Banki district was a 'typical Talukdari district' where some large estates of taluqdars occupied the substantial portion of the district. It was reported that tenants of those taluqdari estates were oppressed by not only rack-renting and concealing rent but also nazarana and begar. Ziladars and other agents of landlords openly stated to the inquiry committee that they used 'legitimate severity', namely various sorts of harassment and threat. There happened tenants' 'awakening' after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was settled. Then, for the help and improvement of this difficult condition, many tenants turned to Congress and became congress members and joined the agitation for remission of rent. Therefore, in this district, la,ndlord class recognised Congress flag as 'a symbol of revolt'. 50 In many cases, zamindars were hand in glove with police and revenue authority in realizing rents by means of variety of forcible method. Whoever had something to do with the Congress were threatened to stop the commitments. The refusal of

thread led to every kind of oppression such as physical beating and unlawful confinement. With the support of local authorities, arrests and prosecutions of Congress workers and tenants were carried on under Section 144 and 107 of the 50 Agrarian Distress, pp. 81-94. 170 Criminal Procedure Code. 51 Other versions and cases of the district suggest that irregular and tenant-centred propaganda and aggressive activities were going on. Zamindars complained of local Congress workers who did not follow the instructions of their leaders and preached non-payment of rent.

A Congress worker was said to have told tenants that 'the land was a gift of God. It belonged to the tenant and the zamindar equally and had it belonged to the zamindar, he would have been in a position to take it'. Such 'irregular' propaganda seems to have taken the seat of official Congress programme, because it was also reported that khadis and charkhas were not observed in the district.⁵² In Dadm, on 17th June, 1931, some zamindars and their servants were threatened by Congress workers with social boycott, which lasted for 2 days, of withdrawing services of watermen and sweepers. 'Fines and illegal exactions of all kinds were levied on any one who showed himself well-disposed towards his landlords.'⁵³ In Rae Bareilly district too, acts of oppression by zamindars were reported. Especially the most notorious among them was Khureti Estate which was owned by Sardar Birpal Singh, who had become famous for cruel suppression of kisan protest in 1921. Tenants of Suraj Kund within the estate attempted to file a case to get enhancement of rent set aside. But the legal application was rejected by local court and they had to relinquish their holdings. It was generally observed that taluqdars and zamindars engaged in the oppression with their agents such as karindas and other armed forces. Tenants were physically attacked for zamindars' false allegations or without any specific legitimate reason. Women were also harassed and beaten. ⁵⁴ Here, in this district too, zamindars' operation of realizing rent from tenants was supported by the colonial powers. On 13th 51 *ibid.*, pp. 94-112. ⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7. ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 69. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 115. 171 July, 1931, in Panwari, a hamlet of Daulatpur village near Unchahar, tenants' retaliation against a kanungo's forcible realization of rent and physical suppression led to firing by armed police who accompanied with the kanungo. Two of the tenants were killed and one was injured. Being Congress worker was a reason for harsh realization of rent by landlords and their agents with the use of violent and threatening methods. ⁵⁵ Strongly knitted alliance between landlord, his agents, and the local authority was observed in other districts too because both interests came to a confluence of suppressing tenant-cum-Congress workers. This alliance attempted to deprive tenants of as much as possible as well as intensively suppressed the Congress in rural area. In Gonda, the Congress report says major troubles have happened only in Balrampur Raj, one of the largest taluqdari estates in Oudh. At Baraipur village in the estate, on 9th May, 1931, thikadar with then .. agents tried to forcibly realize rent from the tenants. The result was violent clash and subsequent court battle between the two parties.

Police and judicial authorities were in favour of the thikadar, and 23 persons exclusively on the side of tenants, including many Kurmis, were arrested. Meanwhile, the estate tahsildar and his followers raided the village. Tenants' houses were looted, movable properties were taken away, and women were dishonoured by them. In SiJniri village of the estate too, on the next day, the thikedar committed same outrage against women. The district authority was, by and large, reluctant to take any action against these incidents.⁵⁶ Agrarian troubles in Bahraich district have occurred mostly in Nanpara estate. Agents of the estate such as thikadars and ziladars attempted to forcibly realize rents ⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 119-121. ⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 130-5. ¹⁷² despite government's decision of remitting rent. With the support of local authority, acts of suppressions by landlords and his agents were made against those tenants who were either sympathizer of the Congress or actively helping the activity or Congress members themselves. In village of Agaya, ziladars and Court peons attempted to arrest tenants allegedly for non-payment of rents before judgement of the court was issued. But tenants resisted and the attempt of arrest failed. As warrants of arrest were issued, then a party consisting of police and estate employees, numbering 3 or 4 hundreds, raided the village. The villagers accused were arrested after receiving severe beating and serious injuries. Other villagers, including women, also got injured and some of their houses were damaged 01' burnt down. Out of 17 persons who were convicted, 8 men were Congress workers. ⁵⁷ It was reported that kisans in southern portion of the Sultanpur district were 'awakening'. Because the area was close to Rae Bareilly district, Congress workers could easily come from the neighbouring district to mobilize people of the area. National flags were hoisted at many places. Since landlords were reluctant to remit rent of tenants in proportion to the remission in revenue, it was difficult for tenants of the area to get relieved from it. Landlords imposed typical oppressive cesses such as nazarana, and begar on tenants. It was also reported that fencing of tenants' fields were destroyed allegedly because of non-payment of their rents. Some attempts of social boycott were made, in which barbers and washer men refused to offer their services to those defaulting tenants. Taluqdars, in addition, ordered their men to do lathi-charge against tenants including women. Such lathi-charge was often used by zamindars as a usual method of oppression. Some zamindars tried to realize full ⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 141-2. ¹⁷³ amount of rent in spite of the remission and demanded to remove the Congress flags. ⁵⁸ Kisan agitation of Unao district was also active and Baba Ramchandra, who had left a vivid memory of Kisan Sabha movement of Oudh in early 1920s, was said to have taken a prominent part. ⁵⁹ Zamindars and the authority took tough stance against it. In the villages of Pipri, Dandanapur and Sada

Sukh Khera of Dnao, it was said, Brahman zamindars had been taking from tenants series of exactions like nazal'ana, begar, hari as we have already seen in other cases. Concealment of rent was also a usual practice of zamindars. The amount of rent actually realized from tenants was usually estimated to be around 8 to 10 times of the registered rent. Tenants of these zamindars once endeavoured to complain of this oppressed condition to the district authority. On 30th May 1931, however, atrocities were committed, where many tenants suffered physically and economically. A party of Brahman zamindars consisted of ziladars and other armed men made attempts to raid all the houses of tenants there. The party was also accompanied by a Deputy Collector and armed police. According to the Congress report, many victims of inhumane abuse were mostly tenants of lower castes such as Chamar, Teli, and Lodh. 60 Allahabad seemed to be an epicentre of wide-spread agrarian conflict in the eastern portion of the province during the Civil Disobedience Movement. From the city, where the provincial headquarter of the Congress was situated, major Congress leaders such as Nehru and Purshottamdas Tandon spread their pro-kisan propaganda. But within the district itself, many reports of zamindars' oppression were reported to the District Congress Committee. In village Banwaripur, Kahli, Kosipur, Pali, Atradera, zamindars and their agents were said to have made physical attacks and harassment on kisans 58 Ibid., pp. 163-9. 59 Fortnightly Report, April(2), 1931. 60 Ibid., pp. 74-76 and 170-181. 174 who were considered to have something to do with the Congress. More than 5, 000 cases of ejection were reported in the district alone. Zamindars often ejected even those tenants who had paid their full amount of rent. till Kisan activities were also active in the far eastern district. In Gorakhpur district, most of agrarian disputes reported were concentrated in the Maharajganj tahsil and almost all the disputes were over the issue of concealment of rent, ikhta, and customary dues like kolhuavan. Relatively large scale disputes at Siswa Bazar and Rajaura occurred in May and June of 1931 between zamindars supported by local authority and tenants backed by the local Congress.62 Thus, the truce period was to reveal the regional variation of popular activities after the central leadership of the Congress withdrew. In comparison with the western part of UP and even of Bihar, the eastern part of UP suggested more critical situation, where propaganda of class confrontation as well as radical activism reared its head. There were slight signs of integrating the turbulent situation toward any permanent organization. On the 21st April, 1931, Congress leaders of Allahabad decided to form a District Kisan Sabha and Tikaram Tripathi and Mohan Lal Gautam were provisionally elected respectively as the President and the Secretary.63 This organization was not comparable to the West Patna Kisan Sabha or Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha which were more autonomous organizations with stubborn leadership, such as that of Swami Sahajanand. Rather, it appeared to be just like what Siddiqi calls 'Kisan Sabha from above' to refer to the UP Kisan Sabha which was formed by M. M. Malaviya in 1918.

Although some districts Congress Committees urged the provincial leadership to initiate more peasant-oriented campaign, the Provincial Congress Committee was initially not prepared to response to those local voices. But the release of Jawaharlal Nehru changed the situation. In October 1930, the United Provinces Congress Committee passed a resolution and directed both landlords and tenants to withhold their payment. In this stage, the campaign assumed a character of mass agitation. But, as Nehru says, the campaign was to assume class character: Our appeal had addressed both to zamindars and tenants not to pay; in theory it was not a class appeal. In practice most of the zamindars did pay their revenue, even some who sympathised with the national struggle. The pressure on them was great and they had more to lose. The tenantry, however, stood firm and did not pay, and our campaign thus became practically a no-rent campaign In many districts it was not formally adopted or declared, but in effect tenants withheld their rents or, in many cases, were wholly unable to pay them owing to the fall in prices.

But correctly speaking, the resolution and subsequent struggle was to show the contrast between the western and eastern province in a more clear way. As we have already seen, Agra district was an epicentre of Civil Disobedience movement in the province, where official programme of anti-British national movement such as Prabhat phelis and formation of village panchayats was duly performed under and within the strong leadership of Congress workers and its organization. Here in Agra district, the resolution of UPCC in October received positive response from both the zamindars and tenants. Zamindars and tenants joined the campaign of stopping their due payment. Desertion was the most effective way of avoiding the payment as suggested by the example of village Barauda and Bhilaoti. However, the Congress suddenly lost support from rural area during the truce period. One reason for this could attribute to the strengthened suppression by the district authority. In Garhi Shahja village of Etmadpur tehsil, for example, an incident of firing happened on 27th of June, 1931. 4 villagers, all Congress workers, were killed by the police and the party of zamindars who were trying to attach villagers' properties allegedly on account of non-payment of rent.H Another reason is that Congress tactics of no-tax and no-rent campaign was replaced by the one of demanding remission in land revenue. The Congress also instructed tenants to pay their rents to the best of their ability. In the end of April, a report says that the Agra district already had been showing good indication of improving the situation due to the announcement of remission.

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

In the Presidential Address to the first session of All India. Kisan Sabha Swami Sahajanand Saraswati described the peasants as “producers of food”. Then again at the Camilla session of the All India Kisan Sabha, Swami Sahajanand in his Presidential Address considered that the kisans were producers and suppliers of all articles of food and raw materials". He said (while making a distinction between peasants and agricultural labourers) that those who have lands are kisans and those bereft of it are mazdoors (agricultural labourers).

The Kisan Sabha waged another type of struggle against a capitalist, Dalmia Sugar Mill in Bihta. The factory was established in 1932 and Sahajanand provided some help in its initial years. But the factory started the exploitation of cane producers by purchasing their cane at much cheaper rate than that of British factory and the government rate. There were also low-paid labourers in the factory. Sahajanand tried to improve the condition by requesting the company and establishing a suppliers association to fix the price at higher rate. When those efforts were turned out to be in vein, Sahajanand and the Kisan Sabha launched a campaign. They called three strikes respectively in January 1936, January 1938, and the winter of 1938-9. The first strike was waged only by cane producers who refused to sell their cane to the factory. The second one was only by the labourers seeking for higher wage. The third one was a concerted struggle based on the alliance between cane producers and the labourers. In a village of Saran district, Amwari, another historic Bakasht struggle was fought under the leadership of Rahul Sankrityayan. The entire village of 2,000 bighas were under the possession of or held by notorious zamindar Chandreshwar Singh, who, with his father Nanda Kumar Singh, accumulated those lands allegedly by variety of unjust activities with the support of local authority. Kisans of the village were suffering from begar and abwabs provided to the zamindas and natural calamities such as annual floods and earthquake in 1934.

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