



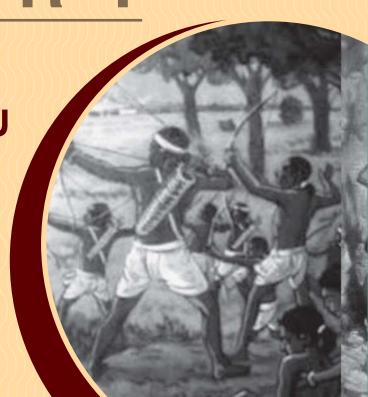
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PEASANTS, TRIBAL & **CASTE MOVEMENTS** 



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# PEASANTS, TRIBAL AND CASTE MOVEMENTS

#### **Peasant Movements with Religious Overtones**

#### ■ Narkelberia Uprising

- Mir Nithar Ali (1782-1831) or Titu Mir inspired the Muslim tenants in West Bengal to rise against landlords, mainly Hindu, who imposed a beard-tax on the Faraizis, and British indigo planters.
- Often considered the first armed peasant uprising against the British, these revolt soon took on a religious hue.
- The revolt later merged into the Wahabi movement.

#### **■ The Pagal Panthis**

- The Pagal Panthi, a semi-religious group mainly constituting the Hajong and Garo tribes of Mymensingh district (earlier in Bengal), was founded by Karam Shah.
- The **tribal peasants organised themselves under Karam Shah's son, Tipu**, to fight the oppression of the zamindars.
- The **government introduced an equitable arrangement to protect these peasants**, but the movement was violently suppressed.



#### ■ Faraizi Revolt

- The Faraizis were the **followers of a Muslim sect founded by Haji Shariat-Allah of Faridpur** in Eastern Bengal.
- They advocated radical religious, social and political changes.
- **Shariat-Allah son of Dadu Mian** (1819-60) organised his followers with an aim to expel the English intruders from Bengal.
- Most of the Faraizis joined the Wahabi ranks.

#### ■ Moplah Uprisings

- **Hike in revenue demand and reduction of field size**, coupled with the **oppression of officials**, resulted in widespread peasant unrest among the Moplahs of Malabar.
- The second Moplah uprising occurred after the **Moplahs came to be organised by the Congress** and the **Khilafat supporters** during the Non-cooperation Movement.
- But **Hindu-Muslim differences distanced the Congress and the Moplahs** from each other.

#### **Early Peasant Movements**

#### **■ Indigo Revolt (1859-60)**

- In Bengal, the indigo planters, nearly all Europeans, exploited the local peasants by forcing them to grow indigo on their lands instead of the more paying crops like rice.
- The planters forced the peasants to take advance sums and enter into fraudulent contracts.
- The anger of the peasants exploded in 1859 when, led by Digambar Biswas and Bishnu Biswas of Nadia district, they decided not to grow indigo under duress and resisted the physical pressure of the planters.
- The planters also tried methods like evictions and enhanced rents.
- The Bengali intelligentsia played a significant role by supporting the peasants' cause.
- The Government appointed an indigo commission to inquire into the problem of indigo cultivation.
- Based on its recommendations, the Government issued a notification in November 1860 that the ryots could not be compelled to grow indigo and that it would ensure that all disputes were settled by legal means.

#### ■ Pabna Agrarian Leagues

- During the 1870s and 1880s, large parts of Eastern Bengal witnessed agrarian unrest caused by oppressive practices of the zamindars.
- The zamindars resorted to enhanced rents beyond legal limits and prevented the tenants from acquiring occupancy rights.
- The peasants of Yusufshahi Pargana in Patna district formed an agrarian league or combination to resist the demands of the zamindars.



- **The league organised a rent strike**—the ryots refused to pay the enhanced rents, challenging the zamindars in the courts.
- The main form of struggle was that of legal resistance; there was very little violence.
- Many peasants were able to acquire occupancy rights and resist enhanced rents.
- The government also promised to undertake legislation to protect the tenants from the worst aspects of zamindari oppression. In 1885, the Bengal Tenancy Act was passed.
- A number of young Indian intellectuals including Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, R.C. Dutt and the Indian Association under Surendranath Banerjea supported the peasants' cause.

#### Deccan Riots

- The ryots of Deccan region of western India suffered heavy taxation under the Ryotwari system.
- The moneylenders were mostly outsiders—Marwaris or Gujaratis.
- The conditions had worsened due to a crash in cotton prices after the end of the American Civil War in 1864, the Government's decision to raise the land revenue by 50% in 1867, and a succession of bad harvests.
- In 1874, the growing tension between the moneylenders and the peasants resulted in a social boycott movement organised by the ryots against the "outsider" moneylenders.
- The **Government succeeded in repressing the movement**. As a conciliatory measure, the **Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act was passed in 1879**.

#### ■ The Kisan Sabha Movement

- After the 1857 revolt, the **Awadh taluqdars had got back their lands**. This strengthened the hold of the Talukdars or big landlords over the agrarian society of the province.
- The majority of the cultivators were subjected to **high rents**, **summary evictions** (**bedakhali**), **illegal levies**, **renewal fees or nazrana**.
- Mainly due to the efforts of the Home Rule activists, kisan sabhas were organised in UP. The United Provinces Kisan Sabha was set up in February 1918 by Gauri Shankar Mishra and Indra Narayan Dwivedi
- Other prominent leaders included Jhinguri Singh, Durgapal Singh and Baba Ramchandra.
- In October 1920, the Awadh Kisan Sabha came into existence because of differences in nationalist ranks. The Awadh Kisan Sabha asked the kisans to refuse to till bedakhali land, not to offer hari and begar (forms of unpaid labour), to boycott those who did not accept these conditions and to solve their disputes through panchayats.
- The centres of activity were primarily the districts of Rai Bareilly, Faizabad and Sultanpur.

#### ■ Eka Movement

- Towards the end of 1921, peasant discontent resurfaced in some northern districts of the United Provinces—**Hardoi, Bahraich, Sitapur**.
- The issues involved were:
  - ▶ High rents—50 per cent higher than the recorded rates;
  - Oppression of thikadars in charge of revenue collection; and
  - Practice of share-rents.



- The assembled peasants vowed that they would:
  - > Pay only the recorded rent but would pay it on time;
  - Not leave when evicted;
  - Refuse to do forced labour;
  - Give no help to criminals;
  - ► Abide by panchayat decisions.
- The grassroot leadership of the Eka Movement came from **Madari Pasi and other low-caste leaders**, and many small zamindars.
- By March 1922, severe repression by authorities brought the movement to an end.

#### ■ Mappila Revolt

- The Mappilas were the Muslim tenants inhabiting the Malabar region where most of the landlords were Hindus.
- The Mappilas had expressed their resentment against the oppression of the landlords.
- Their grievances centred on lack of security of tenure, high rents, renewal fees and other oppressive exactions.
- The Mappila movement merged with the ongoing Khilafat agitation.
- The leaders of the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement like Gandhi, Shaukat Ali and Maulana Azad addressed Mappila meetings.
- After the arrest of national leaders, the leadership passed into the hands of local Mappila leaders.
- Things took a turn for the worse in August 1921 when the arrest of a respected priest leader, Ali
   Musaliar, sparked off large-scale riots.
- **Initially, the symbols of British authority**—courts, police stations, treasuries and offices— and unpopular landlords (jenmies who were mostly Hindus) were the targets.
- What began as an antigovernment and anti-landlord affair acquired communal overtones.
- The communalisation of the rebellion completed the isolation of the Mappilas from the Khilafat-Non Cooperation Movement.

#### ■ Bardoli Satyagraha

- The Bardoli taluqa in Surat district had witnessed intense politicisation after the coming of Gandhi.
- The movement sparked off in January 1926 when the **authorities decided to increase the land** revenue by 30 per cent.
- Bardoli Inquiry Committee was set up to go into the issue. The committee found the revenue hike to be unjustified.
- In February 1926, Vallabhbhai Patel was called to lead the movement. The women of Bardoli gave him the title of "Sardar".
- To organise the movement, Patel set up 13 chhavanis or workers' camps in the taluqa.
- Bardoli Satyagraha Patrika was brought out to mobilise public opinion.
- An intelligence wing was set up to make sure all the tenants followed the movement's resolutions.



- K.M. Munshi and Lalji Naranji resigned from the Bombay Legislative Council in support of the movement.
- The Government set the condition that first the enhanced rent be paid by all the occupants (not actually done).
- Then, a committee went into the whole affair and found the revenue hike to be unjustified and recommended a rise of 6.03 per cent only.

#### ■ Tebhaga Movement

- In September 1946, the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha gave a call to implement, through mass struggle, the Flood Commission recommendations of tebhaga—two-thirds' share—to the bargardars, the share-croppers also known as bagchasi or adhyar, instead of the one-half share. The bargardars worked on lands rented from the jotedars.
- The central slogan was "nij khamare dhan tolo"—i.e., sharecroppers taking the paddy to their own threshing floor and not to the jotedar's house, as before, so as to enforce tebhaga.
- The storm centre of the movement was north Bengal, **principally among Rajbanshis**—a low caste of tribal origin. **Muslims also participated** in large numbers.
- The movement dissipated soon, because of the League ministry's sop of the Bargardari Bill, the popularisation of the Hindu Mahasabha's agitation for a separate Bengal and renewed riots in Calcutta which ended the prospects of sympathetic support from the urban sections.

#### ■ Telangana Movement

- This was the biggest peasant guerrilla war of modern Indian history.
- The princely state of Hyderabad under Asajahi Nizams was marked by a combination of religious-linguistic domination, total lack of political and civil liberties, grossest forms of forced exploitation by deshmukhs, jagirdars, doras (landlords) in forms of forced labour (vethi) and illegal exactions.
- The uprising began in July 1946 when a deshmukh's thug murdered a village militant in Jangaon taluq of Nalgonda.
- The peasants organised themselves into village sanghams, and attacked using lathis, stone slings and chilli powder.
- The movement was at its greatest intensity between August 1947 and September 1948.
- The peasants **brought about a rout of the Razagars**—the Nizam's stormtroopers.
- Once the Indian security forces took over Hyderabad, the movement fizzled out.
- The **Telangana movement had many positive achievements** to its credit.
- In the villages controlled by guerrillas, vethi and forced labour disappeared.
- Agricultural wages were raised.
- Illegally seized lands were restored.
- Steps were taken to fix ceilings and redistribute lands.
- Measures were taken to improve irrigation and fight cholera.
- An improvement in the condition of women was witnessed.
- The autocratic-feudal regime of India's biggest princely state was shaken up, clearing the way for the formation of Andhra Pradesh on linguistic lines.



#### 6

#### **Tribal Revolts of Mainland**

#### ■ Pahariyas' Rebellion

- The British expansion on their territory led to an uprising by the martial Pahariyas of the Raj Mahal Hills in 1778.
- The British were forced to usher in peace by declaring their territory as damni-kol area.

#### Chuar Uprising

- Famine, enhanced land revenue demands and economic distress goaded the Chuar aboriginal tribesmen of the Jungle Mahal of Midnapore district and also of the Bankura district (in Bengal) to take up arms.
- These tribal people were basically farmers and hunters. The uprising lasted from 1766 to 1772 and then, again surfaced between 1795 and 1816.
- The Chuars were prominent in Manbhum and Barabhum, especially in the hills between Barabhum and Ghatsila.
- In 1768, Jagannath Singh, the zamindar of Ghatsila, went up in arms, along with thousands of Chuars. The Company government capitulated.
- In 1771, the Chuar sardars, **Shyam Ganjan of Dhadka, Subla Singh of Kaliapal and Dubraj** rose in rebellion.
- The most significant uprising was under Durjan (or Durjol) Singh in 1798. Durjan Singh was the
  zamindar of Raipur from which he was dispossessed owing to the operations of Bengal Regulations.
   The revolt was brutally suppressed by the British.
- Other leaders of the Chuars were Madhab Singh, the brother of the raja of Barabhum, Raja Mohan
   Singh, zamindar of Juriah and Lachman Singh of Dulma.

#### **■** Kol Mutiny (1831)

- The Kols, alongwith other tribes, are inhabitants of Chhotanagpur. This covered Ranchi, Singhbhum,
   Hazaribagh, Palamau and the western parts of Manbhum.
- The trouble in 1831 started with large-scale transfers of land from Kol headmen to outsiders like Hindu, Sikh and Muslim farmers and money-lenders who were oppressive and demanded heavy taxes.
- The Kols resented this and in 1831, **under the leadership of Buddho Bhagat**, the Kol rebels killed or burnt about a thousand outsiders.
- Only after large-scale military operations order was restored.

#### ■ Ho and Munda Uprisings (1820-1837)

- The Raja of Parahat organised his Ho tribals to revolt against the occupation of Singhbhum (now in Jharkhand). The revolt continued till 1827 when the Ho tribals were forced to submit.
- However, later in 1831, they again organised a rebellion, joined by the Mundas of Chotanagpur, to protest against the newly introduced farming revenue policy and the entry of Bengalis into their region.



- 7
- o In 1899-1900, the **Mundas** in the region south of Ranchi rose **under Birsa Munda**.
- The Ulgulan was one of the most significant tribal uprisings in the period 1860-1920.
- The rebellion which began as a religious movement gathered political force to fight against introduction of feudal, zamindari tenures, and exploitation by money-lenders and forest contractors.
- The Mundas claimed Chhotanagpur as their area in 1879.

#### ■ The Santhal Rebellion (1855-56)

- Continued oppression of the Santhals, an agricultural people, who had fled to settle in the plains
  of the Rajmahal hills (Bihar) led to the Santhal rebellion against the zamindars.
- The money-lenders who had the support of the police among others had joined the zamindars to subject the peasants to oppressive exactions and dispossession of lands.
- Under Sidhu and Kanhu, two brothers, the Santhals proclaimed an end to Company rule, and declared the area between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal as autonomous.

#### **■ Khond Uprisings (1837-1856)**

- From 1837 to 1856, the Khonds of the hilly tracts extending from **Odisha to the Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam districts of Andhra Pradesh** revolted against Company rule.
- Chakra Bisnoi, a young raja, led the Khonds who were joined by the Ghumsar, Kalahandi and other tribals to oppose the suppression of human sacrifice, new taxes, and the entry of zamindars into their areas.
- A **later Khond rebellion in 1914 in the Orissa region** hoped that foreign rule would end and they could gain an autonomous government.

#### ■ Koya Revolts

- The **Koyas of the eastern Godavari track** (modern Andhra), joined by **Khonda Sara chiefs**, and rebelled in 1803, 1840, 1845, 1858, 1861 and 1862.
- They rose once again in 1879-80 under Tomma Sora.
- Their complaints were oppression by police and moneylenders, new regulations and denial of their customary rights over forest areas.
- After the death of Tomma Sora, another rebellion was organised in 1886 by Raja Anantayyar.

#### ■ Bhil Revolts

- The Bhils who lived in the Western Ghats controlled the mountain passes between the north and the Deccan.
- They revolted against Company rule in 1817-19, as they had to face famine, economic distress and misgovernment.
- The Bhils revolted again in 1825, 1831 and in 1846.
- Later, a reformer, Govind Guru helped the Bhils of south Rajasthan (Banswara, Sunth states) to organise themselves to fight for a Bhil Raj by 1913.



#### Ramosi Risings

- The Ramosis, the **hill tribes of the Western Ghats**, had not reconciled to British rule and the British pattern of administration.
- After the annexation of the Maratha territories by the British, the Ramosis, who had been employed by the Maratha administration, lost their means of livelihood.
- They rose under Chittur Singh in 1822 and plundered the country around Satara.
- Again, there were eruptions in 1825-26 under Umaji Naik of Poona and his supporter Bapu Trimbakji Sawant, and the disturbances continued till 1829.
- Generally the British followed a pacifist policy towards the Ramosis, and even recruited some of them into the hill police.

#### **Tribal Movements of the North-East**

#### ■ Khasi Uprising

- After having occupied the hilly region between Garo and Jaintia Hills, the East India Company wanted to build a road linking the Brahmaputra Valley with Sylhet.
- A large number of outsiders including Englishmen, Bengalis and the labourers from the plains were brought to these regions.
- The Khasis, Garos, Khamptis and the Singphos organised themselves **under Tirath Singh** to drive away the strangers from the plains.

#### ■ Singphos Rebellion

- The rebellion of the **Singphos in Assam in early 1830 was immediately quelled** but they continued to organise revolts.
- Chief Nirang Phidu led an uprising in 1843, which involved an attack on the British garrison and the death of many soldiers.
- Some of the smaller movements were those of the Mishmis (in 1836); the Khampti rebellion in Assam between 1839 and 1842; the Lushais' revolt in 1842 and 1844, when they attacked villages in Manipur.

#### The Movement of the Working Class

The Indian working class suffered from the same kind of exploitation witnessed during the industrialisation of Europe and the rest of the West, such as low wages, long working hours, unhygienic and hazardous working conditions, employment of child labour and the absence of basic amenities.

#### **■ Early Efforts**

- The early nationalists, especially the Moderates,
  - were indifferent to the labour's cause:



- differentiated between the labour in the Indian-owned factories and those in the British-owned factories;
- believed that labour legislations would affect the competitive edge enjoyed by the Indianowned industries;
- did not want a division in the movement on the basis of classes;
- ▶ **did not support the Factory Acts** of 1881 and 1891 for these reasons.
- 1870: Sasipada Banerjea started a workingmen's club and newspaper Bharat Shramjeevi.
- **1878:** Sorabjee Shapoorji Bengalee tried to get a bill, providing better working conditions to labour, passed in the Bombay Legislative Council.
- **1880:** Narain Meghajee Lokhanday started the newspaper Deenbandhu and set up the Bombay Mill and Millhands Association.
- **1899** The first strike by the Great Indian Peninsular Railways took place, and it got widespread support.

#### All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)

- AITUC was founded on October 31, 1920.
- The Indian National Congress president for the year, Lala Lajpat Rai, was elected as the first president of AITUC and Dewan Chaman Lal as the first general secretary.
- Lajpat Rai was the first to link capitalism with imperialism— "imperialism and militarism are the twin children of capitalism".
- The Gaya session of the Congress (1922) welcomed the formation of the AITUC and a committee was formed to assist it.

#### ■ Trade Union Act, 1926

- Recognised trade unions as legal associations
- Laid down conditions for registration and regulation of trade union activities
- Secured immunity, both civil and criminal, for trade unions from prosecution for legitimate activities, but put some restrictions on their political activities.

#### ■ Trade Disputes Act, 1929

- Made compulsory the appointment of Courts of Inquiry and Consultation Boards for settling industrial disputes;
- Made illegal the strikes in public utility services like posts, railways, water and electricity, unless
  each individual worker planning to go on strike gave an advance notice of one month to the
  administration;
- Forbade trade union activity of coercive or purely political nature and even sympathetic strikes.

#### ■ Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929)

 In March 1929, the Government arrested 31 labour leaders, and the three-and-a-half-year trial resulted in the conviction of Muzaffar Ahmed, S.A. Dange, Joglekar, Philip Spratt, Ben Bradley, Shaukat Usmani and others.



After 1931 there was a dip in the working class movement because of a split in 1931 in which the corporatist trend led by N.M. Joshi broke away from the AITUC to set up the All India Trade Union Federation. In 1935, the communists re-joined the AITUC.

## Caste Movements/Backward-Class Movements

#### Satya Shodhak Samaj

- In Western India, **Jyotirao Govindrao Phule** struggled for the upliftment of lower castes through his Satya Shodhak Samaj.
- He strongly criticized the Brahmanical domination in the name of religion. He was also critic of Indian National Congress for neglecting the weaker sections.
- The aim of his organization was to achieve social justice for weaker sections of the society. He opened a number of schools, orphanages for the children and women belonging to all castes. He was elected as a member of the Poona Municipal committee in 1876.
- In 1888, he was honored with the title of Mahatma. His writings include Dharma Tritiya Ratna, Ishara, Life of Shivaji, etc.

#### ■ Shri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam Movement

- The **non-Brahmin movement** found reflection in Kerala under the **leadership of Shri Narayana Guru** who belonged to the **backward Ezhava caste**.
- He established the SNDP Yogam with its branches outside the Kerala State also.
- He launched a two-point program for the upliftment of the Ezhavas to root out-the practice of untouchability.
- As a second step Narayana Guru built a number of temples, which were declared open to all castes.
- He **criticized Gandhi for his faith in Chaturvarna**, which he considered the parent of the caste system and untouchability. He gave a new slogan "one religion, one caste and one God for mankind".

#### **■ Justice Party**

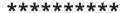
- Mindful of the **importance of literacy as the base of the Brahmins' virtual monopoly** of government offices, the **non-Brahmin elite sought to advance their communities through education**.
- Dr T.M. Nair, P. Thyagaraja Chetty, and C.N. Mudaliar came together and founded the Justice Party in 1916
- It was resolved to form an association of non-Brahman Hindus under the name of South Indian Peoples' Association.
- Chetty **asked all non-Brahmins to unite** and draw the attention of the government to the grievances voiced in the Manifesto.
- With the proclamation of the non-Brahmin Manifesto, it was argued that an association for the political advancement of the non-Brahmin community should also be formed to function alongside the South Indian Peoples' Association.



- In August 1917, the South Indian Liberal Federation came into existence.
- It was announced that the Justice Party's objective was **justice for all Dravidians through the establishment of a separate state** under the watchful guidance of the British rule.
- The Justice Party set itself up against all "negative" methods of passive resistance and noncooperation, which Nair saw as subversive to any ordered and stable government.

#### **■ Self-respect Movement**

- It was founded by Ramaswamy Naicker in 1925. It was designed to improve the living conditions
  of the Dravidian people, to expose the Brahmin tyranny, and the deceptive methods by which
  they controlled all spheres of Hindu life.
- **He organized the "Dravida Nadu Conference"** for the advocacy of a separate and independent "Dravida Nation".
- The demand was reiterated the following year in response to the Lahore Resolution passed by the Muslim League demanding the creation of Pakistan.
- Naicker supported the creation of Pakistan and tried to enlist the support of the Muslim League for the creation of the "Dravida Nation".
- In 1944, Naicker founded the Dravida Kazagham and asked the members to wear black shirts whenever possible to symbolize the present day downtrodden condition of the Dravidians.
- The main objective of the Dravida Kazagham was proclaimed to be the **achievement of a sovereign**, **independent Dravidian Republic federal** in nature with four units **representing the linguistic division**, each division having residuary power and the autonomy in the matter of internal administration.
- No member was allowed to wear any religious marks on the forehead. He called upon the non-Brahmin community to boycott Brahmins at ceremonies.
- The idols of the Hindu deities such as Rama, Ganesha, Krishna, etc. were **deliberately destroyed** and the Ramayana and other Sanskrit epics were distorted to the political ends of the Dravida Kazagam.
- The **movement suffered a split with Annadurai forming the Dravida Munnetra Kazagam** with active support from Karunanidhi, Natarajan, and Sampath.











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