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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.

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- **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 Razaqars**—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.

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.

- 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**.

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■ 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 Indian-owned 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 Banerjee 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 Meghjee 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.

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- 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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