

# Peasant Movements and Agrarian Question in India

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## Introduction

After the independence of the country, the main identity of India was that 'India is an agricultural country'. At the time of independence, nearly 75 percent of India's population depended on agriculture, so the economy was based on agriculture. Agriculture was an integral part of Indian people's life, so agriculture, farmers and non-agricultural income influenced the lives of Indians, however, with the passage of time, agriculture and non-agricultural economy gradually shifted towards industrialization. Along with the expansion of industrialization, the service sector and the systems dependent on the service sector became important, so the agricultural sector came to be considered secondary. Due to these reasons, India's agricultural economy became dependent on the industrial and service sectors. Due to this, in recent times, the number of people working by selling agriculture has increased, and the agricultural economy, which was once the backbone of the rural economy, has broken down. Despite this, rural India is still seen as dependent on agriculture, but as this ratio is decreasing day by day, the problems facing agriculture have become more serious.

Government policies on agriculture, rulers and government do not pay serious attention to agriculture issues, so government statistics show that the country's agriculture and farmers are losing. From the Second Five Year Plan after India's independence, new challenges arose in front of the agriculture sector as the government emphasized on the expansion of industrialization instead of the agriculture sector. Also, due to the severe impact of natural calamities and drought, farmers have become desperate. The central government should take a concrete stand to solve these problems. However, the ruling class implements policies in favor of industrialists to nurture their capital interests. Therefore, agricultural experts criticize that the agricultural sector is being neglected. On the other hand, farmers' organizations in India have remained limited to the name. Due to differences in farmers' organization, there is no single effective organization or movement of farmers. The government takes advantage of the fragmentation of farmers' organizations and movements as per its convenience.

In India, in the 1980s-90s, many farmers' movements emerged in various states of the country, all these farmers' organizations protested against the government's anti-agriculture policy. Maharashtra is no exception to this. Sharad Joshi established a farmers association in Maharashtra during this period. Farmers' organization created its huge influence in Maharashtra for a decade. It affected the politics of the state and the country, but this pressure could not last for long. With India's adoption of an open economy in 1990, the process of globalization, privatization and liberalization gained momentum. Therefore, due to the impact of this policy on the agricultural sector, the economics of agriculture deteriorated, as the prices of agricultural commodities started to fall due to the market-centric policy, the farmer began to face more distress. As a result the farmer started committing suicide due to indebtedness. By capitalizing on this agriculture and farmers, political parties have prepared their vote bank, all political parties have taken a pledge before the elections that farmers are the bread of this world and they should live. Therefore, during the election period, farmers should get guaranteed prices for their agricultural produce, if we come to power, we should give guaranteed prices to farmers' agricultural produce, give promises to waive off their loans and do politics by saying how much we care about farmers. This has become the hallmark of current politics. In this, farmers' organizations also form alliances with political parties that are beneficial for them or for their own interests. or support as constituent parties. These become important features of contemporary politics.

Peasant Movements in India

In India, farmers' movements have held agitations regarding various demands on agricultural issues. The country has a history of farmers' movement since before independence i.e. pre-independence period.

During the pre-independence era, these agitations were carried out to remove the injustice done to the farmers by the feudal lords. Later the British also tortured the farmers in different ways. Many times the farmers called Udal revolt against it, since ancient times till today this injustice has been happening to agriculture and farmers.

Land revenue policies, trade policies and industrial policies of the rulers during the British rule affected the farmers. As a result of this policy, the farmers were forced to pay oppressive taxes. Also due to continuous drought and anti-agricultural policies of the British rulers, agriculture and farmers were in crisis, farmers protested in different parts of the country against this agricultural policy of the British. In Maharashtra too, "Peshwaid Bajirao II increased oppression of the peasantry as he imposed many new taxes on the peasants besides grain." (Chausalkar, 1990, 7) That is, during the British era, there was no restriction on how much grain the landlord could collect from the farmers. Due to this, the farmers were being financially exploited. Also in 1765, the British East India Company introduced the 'Kayamdhara' or 'Zamindari' system in the province of Bengal and introduced the Ryotwari system in the northern parts of Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Madras, then in the provinces of Bombay, Madras and Berar. He started depositing it with the government. But due to being forced to pay this crop in the form of money, the farmer takes a loan from moneylenders to pay the crop. During this period India experienced frequent droughts (1857, 1865, and 1899) in which many people died. In Maharashtra too "in 1877-78 there was a great famine in the southern part of Bombay Province, during which five to six lakhs perished." (Chausalkar, 1990, 10) That is, on the one hand, many people and cattle died in the drought, and on the other hand, many farmers were impoverished due to the loans taken from the moneylenders for doubling the crops and the growing population dependent on agriculture.

From the 19th century in India, the injustice of the farmers started to be broken. In Maharashtra, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule fought against the injustice of the farmers and after working for their enlightenment throughout his life, he presented the idea of total liberation of the farmers in his books 'Shetak-yacha Asood' and 'Ishara'.

Farmers' movement in India

A brief overview of peasant agitations against the British in various parts of independent India :- 1) Uprising of Hindu and Muslim landlords of Awadh between 1778 and 1781. 2) Revolt of Palegaars and their peasants in Tinnevely area of North Arcot from 1801 to 1805, 3) Mopala peasant movement in Kerala led by Mamburao Tangal from 1830 to 1850, 4) Revolt of Santhals from 1855 to 1856. 5) Soldiers' Uprising of 1857 to 1858 Although this uprising was carried out by Hindu-Muslim soldiers, it included poor farmers, artisans and laborers etc. This uprising started all over North and Central India. But this uprising was crushed by the British. 6) Uprising of indigo farmers in Bengal province in 1859-60. 7) Tribal movement led by Birsa Munda in 1890, etc. These peasant movements were carried out in different parts of India under the leadership of a particular leader.

Collective uprising of farmers

After the farmers' movement was suppressed by the British, the farmers staged a mass uprising against the British. They include 1) Vishnupur and Birbhoomi peasant revolt in 1789 2) Jat peasant revolt in Haryana in 1809 3) Khandesh peasant revolt in 1852 4) Santhal uprising in Bengal in 1870 and 5) Deccan riots in 1875. etc. These rebellions and uprisings had an impact on the people. The main reason behind this uprising or rebellion of the farmers is the financial exploitation of the farmers by the landlords and moneylenders. In Maharashtra too, peasants revolted many times against the oppression of the British, including 1) Kolya and Ramosh Uprising (1826) 2) Bhill Uprising (1822 to 1857) 3) In 1867 'Sarvajanik Satyadharma' was established in Pune. As the activists of this meeting campaigned on the issue of farmers, the farmers started saying that they will pay the farm at the same rates. But the government ignored it, Therefore, farmers in Nagar, Solapur, Pune etc Uprising against moneylenders in the district.

In the 20th century, labor, peasant and middle class movements arose in different parts of India, including M. Under Gandhi's leadership, the peasantry joined the mainstream of the national movement. Awareness was created among the farmers through these movements and M. The indigo farmers' movement in Bihar's Champaran and Sara Vasuli's movement in Gujarat, led by Gandhi, took place in 1917 and 1918 respectively. As well as theirs The Kheda Satyagraha (1919) led by the Mopala Peasants' Movement (1921) in Kerala was also a movement due to agrarian discontent. In Maharashtra too, the Khandkari farmers of Satara district protested against the Brahmin and Marwari landlords from 1919 to 1920. So the Mulshi Satyagraha in Pune district in 1920 and the Bardoli Satyagraha in Surat in 1928 under the leadership of Sardar Patel. In the 1930s, Congress workers started the Sara-Bandi movement in Uttar Pradesh's Avadh province to quell peasant discontent. This movement was led by Pandit Nehru. etc. Many such social and political movements have been done by the farmers against the British in the pre-independence period. Congress seems to have done the work of organizing these farmers politically through Kisan Cell and Communists through Kisan Sabha. In this, Congress was actively participating in this movement by organizing the farmers by creating awareness among the farmers to solve the agricultural problems of the farmers. On the other hand, the communist movement started in India in 1920 and the Communist Party of India was founded. Communist parties formed 'Kamgar and Kisan Party' and Congress' views on farmers' issues are not clear; Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha was established in 1936 with such a role. Through this Kisan Sabha the work of Kisan Sabha starts effectively in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bengal. This meeting created awareness among the farmers and paid attention to the issue of rich and poor farmers. In 1938, in Maharashtra, "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Shamrao Parulekar led a march of more than 8,000 farmers from Konkan to the Legislative Assembly of Bombay against Khoti, a type of zamindarshahi then existing in Konkan. Its characteristics were that all these farmers came from Ratnagiri district to Mumbai by boat. was." (Dhawle, 2014, 58) That is, Dr. on the issue of farmers in Maharashtra. Babasaheb Ambedkar raised his voice and raised a fight against Khoti system. Also in Maharashtra under the leadership of Kisan Sabha and Communist Party in Thane district in 1945, the struggle of Warlays was organized under the leadership of Shamrao Parulekar and Godavari Parulekar against the oppression of Warlays by organizing the tribals. During this period, British rule was overthrown for three and a half years in Satara and Sangli districts in Western Maharashtra (1943 to 1946) and a counter-government (Patri government) was established. This government was supported by the peasantry and farm laborers. It was led by Kranti Singh Nana Patil." (Dhawle, 2014, 60) That is, many leaders fought against the government on the issue of farmers.

### **Nature of Farmers Movement in India and Farmers' Parties**

During the post-independence period, farmers have done many agitations in India from time to time. Among them, the Kisan Sabha's 'Tebhaga' movement in Bengal from 1946 to 1947, as well as the farmers' uprising in Telangana in 1946, at that time, the small farmers, clans and farm laborers were facing unfair oppression due to the feudal system of agriculture in the Hyderabad institutions. Against this, the workers of the Communist Party of India organized a protest by organizing the farmers there and uniting the small farmers, big farmers, clans and farm laborers. After this, the impact of the agitation decreased in India, after the Congress government came to power after independence, they started to implement various schemes for the welfare of farmers. It includes abolition of zamindari, clan laws, maximum land tenure etc. Such important decisions were taken. Therefore, this party which raised the issues of poor farmers and farm laborers by opposing the Congress party was not in the politics of the country. Therefore, after 1951, farmers' issues took a back seat in India. In 1967, the Santhal farmers of Naxalbari, a village in West Bengal, revolted against the landlords. This uprising marked the beginning of the Naxalite movement. This movement was led by Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal. After this uprising, communists started farmers' movement in the country. In 1970, he started the 'land grab' movement. The Praja Samajwadi, the United Samajwadi Party and the Republican Party of India joined the movement. In the same decade,

in the states of Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, middle and rich farmers started movements against the government over rising prices of agricultural inputs, "Bharti Kisan Union emerged in Tamil Nadu in 1972-73. Narayan Swamy Naidu founded this organization. Bharatiya Kisan Union is a large farmers' organization. "Never stood before. His agitation on the question of electricity in Tamil Nadu was very popular. Narayan Swamy Naidu is considered the father of the modern farmers' movement." (Habib, 2014, 75) That is, in many states, agitation against the government started on the issue of farmers. Communist Party of India and Marxist Communist Party, Lal Nishan Party, Samajwadi Party and Peasant Labor Party organized agitations focusing on farmers' issues. In the year 1972-73 there was a severe drought in Maharashtra. Kisan Sabha against this drought. Leaders Godavari Parulekar, Gangadhar Appa Burade, Narendra Makusare, Vitthalrao Naik and Krishna Khopkar Shekap Leaders Dajiba Desai, Narayan Patil, Uddhavrao Patil, N. D. Patil and Ganpatrao Deshmukh and Madhavrao Gaikwad are CPI leaders etc. Under the leadership of all of them, there were anti-drought struggles in Maharashtra. (Bansode Gangadhar, 2016, 39 to 44) However, the drought-like situation continues today. Due to this, agriculture and farmer economic is in a dilemma.

### Questions facing the agriculture sector

The number of farmers in India is decreasing day by day. Because agriculture is not financially affordable, the number of farmers has started to decrease. On the other hand, due to the fragmentation of agriculture, it is not affordable to do agriculture. At the same time, the damage caused by natural calamities such as heavy rainfall, drought, cyclone, hailstorm and the spread of diseases and termites are causing agriculture crisis. Instead of finding a permanent solution to this crisis, the government overcomes it with a temporary fix. But as we do not have any mechanism to permanently solve the challenges facing the agriculture sector, the farmer is in crisis. Farmers cannot afford to do farming as they do not get proper guarantee for their agricultural produce, Because the central government does not fix the guaranteed price of agricultural produce. Therefore, the farmers have to sell their crops at the price that falls. Due to these reasons, agriculture is also in the vortex of crisis.

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Mahratta