

A STUDY OF THE FARMERS MOVEMENT IN INDIA: A STUDY OF THEIR POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

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He argues that one of the most important contributing factors to peasant uprising throughout history has been the indebtedness of the peasants as a result of their low income in relation to their necessities. Their small holdings, low productivity, low pricing for their produce relative to the high cost of their inputs, high taxes, excessive capitalization and mechanization, phony inputs, inadequate irrigation infrastructure, and other problems could all contribute to their low incomes. He explains the difficulties faced by small holdings before arriving at the conclusion that peasant proprietors cannot escape going into debt unless they are exceptionally diligent and frugal or unless they have an additional source of income (ibid:280). He remarked about the Indian province of Bihar, "The Bihar is agriculturally the most prosperous province in India, and is likely also the most indebted" In order to create dependable irrigation systems and develop

previously uncultivated territory, colonial authorities in Bihar's Indus basin constructed a number of canal colonies in the second part of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Farmers, Political, irrigation systems, prosperous province, uncultivated territory.

A. Introduction

With a focus on the dynamics in the class structure and class consciousness of the participants and leaders of these movements, this study aims to explore the evolving course of the farmers' movement in Bihar. The goal of this study is to look at how the farmers' movement in Bihar has evolved through time. Social scientists have not been drawn to Bihar to do in-depth research on the state's history of organized peasant movements, even though a large number of studies have been conducted on various elements of the agrarian crisis, particularly after the time of the Green Revolution. This is true despite the fact that organized peasant movements have a long history in Bihar dating back to both the time before and after independence. At various moments in history, peasants have been able to quell a great deal of discontent and have given rise to a great number of smart leaders (Gill & Singhal: 1984). Peasant and agricultural movements are included in the broader category of social movements. In order for a society to develop, social movements are crucial. The process of social movements is continuing, much like the process of social advancement, and at some time in their life cycles, they will undergo a process of metamorphosis. For various reasons and at various times before to the nation's independence, Bihar remained a stronghold of peasant movements. On the other side, one of the main causes of the rebellion was peasant debt. By concentrating on the "bondage of debt" and stating that "the Bihar peasant is born in debt, lives in debt, and dies in debt," M.L. Darling, writing in the 1920s, attracted attention to the problem of peasant debt in Bihar. By emphasizing the reality that "the Bihar peasant is born in debt, lives in debt, and dies in debt," he was able to accomplish this.

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In order to create dependable irrigation systems and develop previously uncultivated territory, colonial authorities in Bihar's Indus basin constructed a number of canal colonies in the second part of the nineteenth century. The British colonial rulers of these nations imposed an abiana, sometimes known as a water tax, on the peasant settlers at the start of the 20th century. The fact that the poor peasants owed so much money to money lenders made it impossible for them to pay this fee on top of their other debt obligations. The peasants launched a revolt against it in 1907 under the direction of Sardar Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai. The song "Pagri Sambal Jatta" by Banke Dyalji, a clarion call to farmers to preserve their turbans, helped this movement acquire popularity. In order to direct the movement, Sardar Ajit Singh and his allies established a political party called "Mujahdeen-e- Wattan," commonly known as "Bharat Mata Society" (Mother India Society).

The government's plans to enact this tax have been abandoned as a result of the pressure this movement has exerted (Singh1991a: 88). The Bihar peasantry was successful in suppressing yet another revolt against the water prices in 1924. In the state of Bihar, Kisan Sabha activism was particularly active. The A.I.K.S. bragged about having more than 30,000 members in the state in 1943. Early in the 1930s, the Kisan Sabha was in charge of organizing the peasantry around the issue of water fees and land revenue.

OBJECTIVES

1. To explain the farmers' movement's class structure, giving close attention to the movement's leadership and involvement.
2. To describe the interactions between identities like caste, gender, and class in these farmer movements.

II. CRISIS AND CHANGES DURING 20TH CENTURY IN AGRARIAN SOCIETY OF BIHAR

A. Social movements are a result of conditions that exist historically and objectively within a society at a particular period. When certain social conditions impede the advancement of particular social forces in a society, such forces will seek to change those conditions in order to remove the obstacles obstructing their advancement in the society. In fact, these social conditions are also produced by other social forces that oppose such beneficial changes in the community; they do not arise in a vacuum and do not function freely and spontaneously. In turn, social movements for social change are mobilized as a result of these types of social conditions, which result in social conflict between opposing social forces.

B. Based on the developmental changes that took place following the country's independence in 1947, the agrarian society and economy can be divided into three distinct historical phases: the period before land reform and the green revolution (1947–1967); the period after the green revolution (1967–1990); and the period after liberalization, privatization, and globalization (1990–present) (1990-2016). The trajectory of the state's farmer movement can be followed as it relates to these various stages of growth.

C. Before Land Reforms and Green Revolution (1947-67):

Geographically and politically, the state of Bihar was divided into two parts at the time of independence: the Bihar region, which was ruled directly by British imperialism before independence, and the Patiala and East Bihar States Union, or PEPSU (also known as part B state), which was created in 1948 by an agreement between the Indian government and nine smaller princely states. The state of Bihar was divided politically into (Sandhu 2001: 102). The following year, in 1956, PEPSU eventually became a part of the state of Bihar. The land tenure systems in the states of Bihar and PEPSU at the time were different from one another.

Regarding the system of land tenure, there were two main types of villages in the PEPSU: bhaichara villages and biswedari villages. The agricultural workers who lived in the Bhaichara villages owned them. This describes a resounding majority of the towns and villages. Only 7.585% of all known estates belonged to this group, and Patiala, the biggest of these princely republics in 1931, had the highest percentage. All of these princely states were like this. On the other hand, this percentage fell to 63.74 percent by 1941. Lamardars who were chosen from the

bhaichara were in charge of collecting direct payments from peasant proprietors in the form of land income (community). These owners received pattas, which is another word for ownership deeds, during the course of the ordinary settlement. At the same time, the division of land began to be based on ancestral shares. There were also other villages throughout the state that followed the biswedari way of life. In these regions, landowners who were not involved in agriculture were referred to as biswedars. Biswedari properties were divided among 700 separate entities in 1908; by 1984, there were 784 such holdings. Mann (1984:192; compare Sandhu (2001)).

They used that land to farm the land in issue. Peasants known as Muzahras (tenants) controlled the land that they had been using for a long time. In the state, tenants were in charge of cultivating 38.92% of the total area of land used for agriculture. Non-occupant tenants or tenants-at-will were referred to as gair-marusimuzahras, whereas occupancy tenants were known as marusimuzahras. Tenants were divided into these two main categories (Sandhu 2001:103). Similar rules were adopted by other princely states (Singh 1991 and Vaid 1984, 1988). In 1950–1951, PEPSU judged 35.6 percent of families to be owner-occupants and 16.90 percent to be pure renters in the villages (Gill 1989 cf. Gill and Ghuman 2001: 30 and Gill 2001:173). In a different study, Gill estimates that of the total leased out land in PEPSU, 32.83 percent was leased out by owners who did not engage in cultivation, and the remaining area was leased out by owners who did engage in cultivation. Gill uses data from the NSS to make this determination (Gill 2001:172). According to Gill and Ghuman, who reference the official data made public by the PEPSU administration in 1953, there were 616,799 acres of land farmed by occupancy tenants and 1,046, 532 acres of land farmed by tenants-at-will in PEPSU in 1953. Additionally, they claim that there were 50,838 tenants-at-will who farmed a total of 375,960 acres while not owning any land. In addition to the biswedari tenures, there were also jagirs and khalsa tracts (Mann 1984 cf. Sandhu 2001). The Patiala rulers formed feudatories called jagirs, and the jagirdards—those who possessed the title of jagir—were given the authority to levy land tax in the jagir districts they governed. For several of the nearby settlements, the jagirdards also acted as the biswedars. They consequently reaped the benefits of both land rent and land income from their jagirs. Similar to the jagir lands, the khalsa tract had a natural setting. The kings possessed property as part of their personal estate close to the place where they exercised their power as rulers. The monarchs obtained land revenue as well as land rent from this land. As a result, both of these terms have been combined with the biswedari terms for the purpose of analysis (Sandhu 2001: 104).

On the other hand, most experts concur that in the state of Bihar, at the time of the partition, approximately 40% of the land that was being cultivated was being rented to tenants (Bardhan 1976; Ladejinsky 1977; NSS 8th Round; Talib 1986 cf. Gill and Ghuman 2001). According to Ladejinsky (1977) and Gill and Ghuman (2001), between 30 and 40 percent of the land in Bihar was farmed by tenants-at-will in 1952, but only between 7 and 10 percent of the land was rented to occupancy tenants. It demonstrates that between 37 and 50 percent of Bihar's total arable land was farmed by tenants in 1952, whereas Talib (1986; see Gill 2001) calculated that this proportion was 48.2 percent at the time. Therefore, it is safe to assume that in 1952, about 50% of the agricultural land was rented out. Based on data from the NSS, Gill (2001) calculates that non-cultivating absentee land owners in Bihar provided almost 50% of the acreage that was leased out from 1950–1951 to 1953–1954. Additionally, he asserts that 35.99% of households in the state were owners-cum-tenants, compared to 19.51% of households who were pure tenants who did not own any land. Therefore, it is abundantly clear that both states had a large ratio of tenants. The question that now needs to be answered is what kind of tenancy relationships they were, as well as what kind, degree, and methods of exploitation were used inside these tenancies. During the PEPSU era, tenants were obligated to pay the property's owners land rent in the form of batai, sometimes referred to as share-cropping, which was equivalent to one-third to one-fourth of the harvest. It lacked continuity throughout. The main source of conflict in rural social relationships—which contributed to the appalling living conditions of the tenants—was land rent paid in kind. According to this arrangement, three people assess the standing crop's yield at the time of harvest and decide what percentage of the revenues will be distributed to the bisweddar in the form of batai. Three people were present: the tenant's candidate, the government's representative, and the bisweddar's representative. The agent of the bisweddar was the third person. The kankut system was the name given to this technique. The majority of votes were cast by the landlord's agent and the government official combined. The crop was typically evaluated at a higher value than it actually was, giving the landlord a larger part in most cases. The most despised type of share-cropping was this one (Mann 1984; Singh 1991; Vaid 1984, 1988; Sandhu 1991 cf. Sandhu 2001). Tenants also had to pay a number of other arbitrary taxes in addition to the burdensome batai. They were obligated to pay a number of fees, including as the abiana tax (also known as the water tax), the khush-hasiyat tax (also known as the betterment tax), and others. Begar, also referred to as free or forced labor, was a widespread practice in the state of Patiala. The entire village was expected to provide all of their food, including milk, ghee, eggs, and other consumables, when a member of the royal family camped there. They

were not even allowed to keep milk for their own children. The tenants were expected to make a financial contribution in accordance with tradition each time a member of the royal family was married, even though they were not invited to the wedding (Sandhu 2001: 103). The state's collection of land revenue was egregiously high and applied different rates to different farmer groups. Initially, it made up anywhere between one-fifth and one-half of the entire crop, with one-third being the norm. The strain imposed on the state increased as a result of several local levies. All cesses were transformed into cash rates after 1862, when the value of the land revenue was calculated in cash, and they were thereafter limited to a percentage equal to 25% of the land revenue. Due to the rate being substantially higher than it was in the territories that surrounding British Bihar, the burden of land income was exceedingly onerous for both the tenants and the peasant proprietors (Mann 1984 cf. Sandhu 2001). The high land income allowed the peasant owners to be more flexible with the tenants about the payment of land revenue. It was only natural that they would harbour grudges against one another.

D. As was previously proven, even prior to the country's independence, British Bihar had a lower burden of land revenue than the princely states of PEPSU. Peasants were also given ownership rights over the land after the Mehalwari System of land tenure was adopted in British Bihar. Due to the division of the state of Bihar following independence, many farmers moved from the west to the east or the east to the west. This led to the decision to select the west Bihar land, which was more developed and had a guaranteed canal irrigation infrastructure. In comparison to the land that was available in the east of the state, the farmers who relocated to the east of the state left behind more land in west Bihar. As a result of having their holdings decreased, refugees from western Bihar were given smaller land allocations, with these reductions being based on the relative quality of the land in each region. Because of this, there were far fewer landlords than in princely kingdoms and the vast majority of peasants possessed proprietorships. Even large farmers were self-cultivators for two reasons: first, the British rulers had already introduced elements of capitalist farming to a greater extent in the areas of west Bihar while creating canal colonies, making those areas more progressive; and second, the refugee farmers had lost everything while migrating from west Bihar and in order to stand on their own two feet, they had to put in a lot of hard work themselves rather than relying upon t This nationalistic sentiment was influenced by the fact that during the period preceding independence, peasants in princely states fought against oppressive princely rulers and feudal

landlords, while in British-ruled Bihar, peasants were more actively engaged in the freedom struggle against foreign rulers.

E. Before independence, there was already a strong peasant movement in PEPSU lands against feudalism and repressive royal restrictions. The peasants were in charge of this movement. Following its independence, the nation grew more dynamic as a result of the liberation of neighbouring Bihar regions from foreign rule. Many peasants from princely regions have ties to these places through their families. The ultimate freedom from the oppression and exploitation of feudal society was an aim shared by tenants and peasant proprietors of PEPSU. It is possible to trace the roots of peasant mobilization, which subsequently evolved into a mass movement, to this exploitative system. It began as violent clashes that happened out of the blue, but it has since developed into a well-organized movement that is spreading to new areas and has a growing mass base. The tenants demanded the thappa system be abolished during the first phase, which ran from 1900 to 1925, prior to the nation's independence. A heap of grains was imprinted with the landlord's seal after being smeared with wet clay in various places, which was embarrassing. Prior to the batai, the tenant was in charge of keeping the heap maintained; if a stray animal damaged the seal, the tenant was charged with crop theft and penalized as a result (Sandhu 2001:105). The exploitation of tenants took on a more brutal form when the thappa system was abolished in 1925 thanks to the introduction of the kankut system, which was required by royal order. The topic was divisive from the discussion's very beginning (Vaid 1984; Singh 1991; Sandhu 1991 cf. Sandhu 2001). Beginning in 1937, a series of uprisings against the batai system were launched (Mann 1984; Vaid 1984, 1988; Sandhu 1991 cf. Sandhu 2001). When tenants refused to pay the rent and started violently reclaiming the land they had been evicted from previously, the movement, which had been organized under the banner of the Tenants War Council, reached its pinnacle. The movement's turning point was reached by this. However, the movement experienced a major setback as a result of the start of World War II in 1939. (Vaid 1988 cf. Sandhu 2001). It was partly brought about by the Communist Party of India's policy of participation during World War II and partly brought about by the state government's persecution (Sandhu 2001:106).

III. FARMERS MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

The farmer holds a prominent position in India's traditional society, and farmers conglomerates have frequently helped farmers find solutions to problems affecting their families and themselves. Farmers, and smaller farmers in particular, have been a group that has been exploited both economically and socially. Because of the inhumane treatment they endured, they eventually formed a group and engaged in negotiations to acquire what they wanted. Additionally, they need the support of an organization, like the Farmers Association, that will protect their interests in the case that the state does not. Today, they advocate for increased government expenditure on agriculture and take a stance against unneeded taxes. The Indian farmers have wisely concluded that the best way for them to apply pressure is to do so as a pressure group while maintaining their independence from the framework of recognized political parties. India is primarily an agricultural nation; hence the agrarian question continues to be central to discussions about the nation's development. All of these many discourses point in the same general direction, which is that the structure and operation of an agrarian economy posed serious obstacles to the effort to promote a sense of equality in the socioeconomic and political arenas. In order to extort exorbitant rent or money from those who worked the land by using a range of practices that were unfriendly against farmers, the ruling class promoted the establishment of the earlier system. Ultimately, the peasantry in different regions of the country organized protest movements in response to these actions. As a result of the emergence of a merchant class in the society, peasants eventually lost their significance as a source of capital. They continued to generate food and fiber, which was still their main duty. The majority of the disruption caused by India's repeated civil wars and military engagements was largely borne by peasants. Farmers in different places only rebelled when they were subjected to assaults that were too great for them to tolerate.

A. MOVEMENTS

A sizable percentage of the labor that goes into making the state more democratic is carried out by civil society and social movement organizations. 1 First, the associational networks of civic organizations and movements can offer both essential knowledge about social needs and the infrastructure for mobilization needed to enable ongoing and meaningful participation. Additionally, networks of civic organizations and movements may enable meaningful participation. Second, civil society organizations support, promote, and help citizens build their technical and democratic capacities, whether through the employment of contentious social

movements or cyclical credit schemes. They usually foster demand-making strategies that are a lot more methodical than those favoured by businesses with a more hierarchical structure. In addition to mobilising public support for reforms, movements have the capacity to significantly contribute to the occurrence of such a shift through popularising more democratic institutions and procedures through prefigurative activities. This process phase may be of the utmost importance. 2 Additionally, because democratic decentralization goes beyond enacting laws and redistributing resources, it requires far more resources than the state's resources to be effective and, more crucially, to be sustainable over the long term. It is possible to conceptualize the distinction between an agitation and a movement as being similar to that between a combat and a war. The individual parts of a movement, or agitations, can be separated apart, yet a movement is more than the sum of its agitations. It's also conceivable for a movement to start as occasional agitation without any overarching beliefs or goals. At the very least on the level of the region in which it is occurring, a movement is defined by the presence of a class basis and the desire to change the current social order or the power structure. In order to justify its acts, it also has an ideology.

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The efficiency and, more importantly, the long-term survival of democratic decentralization require far more than the state's capacity, as it goes beyond legislative actions and resource reallocation. It is possible to conceptualize the distinction between an agitation and a movement as being similar to that between a combat and a war. The individual parts of a movement, or agitations, can be separated apart, yet a movement is more than the sum of its agitations. It's

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German sociologist Loreng Union Stein is credited with coining the term "social movement" in his book "History of the French Social Movements from 1789 to the Present." It appeared at first that the working class as a whole underwent a continuous and unified process in which they grew in strength and self-awareness. The journal *Die Gegennart* asserts that "Social Movements are in general nothing more than an initial search for a legitimate historical outcome." 3 The emergence of social movements is the most frequent and well-known variation of a series of agitations. A systematic, coordinated, and persistent challenge against authorities, powerful people, or cultural ideas and practises that is not supported by any institutions is known as a social movement. Political acts provide a template for social actions that provide insight into decisions made in other spheres of life. Social movements also include the political sphere. The vast majority of social movements are being frank and direct in their demands. As a result, the state gets involved in the dispute not only as the complainant but also as the arbiter. This viewpoint, which has developed into the political process theory as we know it today, likewise views social movements as being quite rational. In reality, they were merely a routine aspect of politics that involved the use of extra constitutional safeguards. By highlighting the interplay between social movements and the state, these process theories have placed a strong emphasis on conflict and the external context of social movements.

IV. CONCLUSION

With special attention to the changes in the class structure and class consciousness of the members and leaders of these movements, this study aims to explore the shifting trajectory of the farmers' movement in Bihar. The goal of the present study is to evaluate the evolving course of the Indian farmers' movement as part of a bigger undertaking. Social movements, which include movements for peasants and farmers as well as social movements more generally, have a direct impact on how society develops. The process of social movements is continuing, much like the process of social advancement, and at some time in their life cycles, they will undergo a process of metamorphosis. This study's main goals are to shed light on Bihar's history of left-leaning farmer movements since independence, situate those events in the context of that region's agrarian society's transition, and offer an explanation of the real-world factors that

contributed to the resurgence of these movements in the twenty-first century. Additionally, it aims to look into the contradictions between the programmes, demands charters, and battles undertaken by the leftist-led farmer organizations and their theory and practice in those areas. Additionally, it intends to outline the farmer movement's class structure, placing special attention on the movement's leadership and members.

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