

PEASANT MOVEMENTS AND FARMERS' MOVEMENTS

- **Ghanshyam Shah** - Peasants refer to the agriculturists who are
 - Homogeneous with small landholdings operated by family labour.
 - Engaged in 'Self-Cultivation' and produce for Subsistence and livelihood.
 - Can make Autonomous decisions with regards to cultivation and therefore exclude Tenants / Sharecroppers/Agricultural Labourers.
 - There are however some scholars who prefer to use the term broadly to refer to all classes of people engaged in Agriculture.
 - Farmer, on the other hand, refers to a person who produces for the market in search for Profitability .He belongs to the propertied and well established Agrarian strata of the rural society.
- **Barrington Moore** questions the revolutionary potential of the Indian Peasantry and argues that Indian Peasant is docile & passive. This is primarily due to stronghold of Caste & Religion over Indian Peasant, concept of Moh-Maya (Non-attachment to the material world), Fatalistic attitudes, Doctrine of Karma (Present conditions of life shaped by actions of past life).
- He argues that Peasant Movements or rebellions or revolts in pre-modern India were rare and ineffective where as peasants and landed upper class in west played a significant role Eg . French revolution, Peasant rebellions in Russia & China leading to the rise of communist states.
- **Eric Stoks** also find very few peasant revolts in India.
- However , these arguments of Moore have been challenged by scholars like Kathleen Gough, AR Desai, DN Dhangare and Ranajit Guha.
- **Kathleen Gough** argues that Peasant revolts have been common during the last two centuries in every state of present day India. She has counted 77 revolts.
 - Even the Revolt of 1857 can't be viewed in Isolation as large no. of Peasants participated in the revolt/ mutiny to overthrow the British rule. She categorised it as a "Restorative movement".
 - She also disagrees with Moore regarding Caste as a barrier to Peasant movements. She argues that a no. of movements were led by lower caste Hindus.
- **A.R Desai**- Indian society during Colonial period is replete with large scale peasant protests & movements involving a vast body of peasants & lasting for years .
- **Dhanagare** argues that Moore's arguments are a mere reiteration of certain stereotypes of Indian society and does not constitute a Systematic theory .
- **Ranajit Guha** - For the first 3/4 th (3 quarters) of British rule, there were multiple Agrarian Disturbances of Different forms and scale. He counts 110 revolts until the end of the 19th century.

Typology and classification of Peasant Movements

- **AR Desai** - He classifies Peasant moves into pre-Independence movements & post - Independence movements. He prefers to call struggles in the colonial period as 'Peasant Struggles' and those of the post - Independence era as 'Agrarian Struggles'. The phrase Agrarian struggle is meant to convey that they involve not only peasants but others as well . These include
 - Movements launched by Agrarian proletariat (Agrarian Poor) - Landless labourers, Tenants/Sharecroppers and Poor Peasants.
 - Movements launched by Rich and Middle farmers.
- **Ghanshyam Shah** - Peasant movements differ according to the variability of Agrarian regimes or structures and as the later undergo changes, the Nature of Peasant Movements also varies. The classification is based on time-period because different time periods were characterised by different Land tenure systems & different Agrarian Class Structure and therefore nature of grievances and discontent also varies .
- **Gail Omvedt** classifies the Agrarian struggles into Old and New, the former as Peasants' Movements and the later as Farmers' Movements.
- **Kathleen Gough** classifies the Peasant Movements into 5 types on the basis of Goals, Methodology and Ideology of the movement. These are:
 - 1) Restorative Movements – To restore earlier Social structure and Agrarian relations. She argues that the revolt of 1857 is also a Peasant struggle in which large no. of Peasants participated from Awadh region to restore the Pre-colonial agrarian structure/MOP. British introduced large scale changes in the rural areas specially through their Land Revenue policy which altered the Production Relations and Mode of Agricultural Production and absolutely ruined the countryside. Similarly Santhal rebellion was a reaction against increasing Land Alienation triggered by British LR policy. Tribals were reduced to Landless Agricultural labourers while their land was being encroached upon by exploitative outsiders (Dikus) – Traders, Contractors and Moneylenders. The rebellion was organized to restore their old way of life.
 - 2) Religious Movements- Outwardly, they appear to be case of mobilization on religious lines but real grievances are based on underlying economic conditions of the Peasantry. British classified them as communal conflicts. Kathleen Gough argues that these uprisings outwardly appear to be Religious or Communal conflicts but the fundamental reasons are economic and therefore are actually Class conflict between the Poor Muslim Peasantry and Rich Hindu landlords. Eg. Faraizi Uprisings, Moplah rebellion. (Not a single instance where a Hindu Tenant was attacked, Some of its leaders were Hindus, Target of attack was Zamindars and most of them were Hindus and even Muslim Zamindars were also not spared).
 - 3) Social Banditry – It is a form of Social Resistance where illegal acts are supported by the oppressed as moral and acceptable. These were forms of organized rebellions

where peasants took to Banditry as a form of resistance against the oppressive landlords, colonial officials and the state. Bandits were often seen as heroes by the local peasantry who often robbed the rich and distributed wealth to the poor.

- 4) Terrorist Vengeance with the idea of meting out collective justice. These movements involved small group of peasants engaging in violent and targeted actions against specific individuals typically local landlords, moneylenders or colonial officials as a form of revenge (Physical Attacks and Assassinations- Terror and Fear).
- 5) Mass Insurrections - Large scale uprisings involving substantial number of peasants (mass movement) aimed at overthrowing existing systems of exploitation and typically targeting Landlords, Moneylenders and Colonial authorities. Eg. Tebhaga movement and Telangana movement.

Reasons/Causes/Issues

- **Economic**-It is argued that Peasants generally revolted when their economic conditions deteriorated. The reasons were:
 - 1) Structural changes which led to increase in exploitation of peasants consequently undermining their economic interests. For instance, British LR policies and taxation laws contributed to the pauperization of the countryside.
 - 2) Lack of Security of Tenure i.e. protests against arbitrary evictions from land (Bedakhali), protest against arbitrary increase of Rent, Illegal dues and levies. **S.B Chaudhuri** argues that one of the major cause behind the revolt of 1857 was the collusion of British officials and moneylenders which allowed the Urban Traders-cum-moneylenders to usurp the lands of the poor peasants.
 - 3) Deteriorating economic conditions due to price rise of essential commodities or inflation/famines/droughts/floods etc. Eg. Kheda Satyagraha of 1918- Peasants revolted due to failure of Kharif crops, Rising prices of essential commodities due to first world war. **Hardiman** argues that the deteriorating economic conditions in backdrop of 2nd world war constituted an important factor behind rise of Tebhaga Movement in W.B (1946-47, precursor- Bengal famine) and Telangana movement in A.P (1946-51).
 - 4) Rising Aspirations of Peasants- Maratha uprisings or Deccan Riots of 1875 – Cotton demand plummeted dramatically after end of American Civil War (started in 1961).
- **Religious factors**- Eg. Moplah revolt, Wahabi and Faraizi uprisings. Mobilisation of peasants was facilitated due to overlap of religious identities with Class divisions (Class Contradictions). British interpreted them as communal riots rather than as riots driven by conflict of economic interests between Muslim Tenants and Hindu landlords.

Scholars disagree over this. But it is accepted that the fundamental reasons were economic but Religion played an important role too.

- Issues related to Share-cropping. Eg. Tebhaga Movement (to reduce the landlord's share to one-third).
- Protest against Vetti (SI) or Begar/Hari (NI) – Forced Labour. Individuals from lower class/caste (Agricultural Labourers) were forced to render services without wages. They were merely provided with some food and clothes. Eg. Peasant movement led by Awadh Kisan Sabha against Hari/Begar which got organically linked with Non-Cooperation movement (1919-1922).
- Changes in the mode of production in Indian Agriculture have disturbed the traditional agrarian relations which led to Agrarian unrest. Old Agrarian system collapsed, new land tenures created, new social classes emerged and the peasantry came under the iron grip of Zamindars. Under the British Rule, land became a marketable commodity and commercial agriculture developed. **Barrington Moore** argues that commercialization of agriculture under the British led to Proletarianisation of Peasantry and traditional bonds got eroded thereby providing possibilities of insurrection. **DN Dhanagare** argues that commercialization of agriculture under the British was not accompanied by any large scale Modernisation of agriculture. Indian Agriculture developed commercially without disturbing fundamentally Feudal relationships. Consequently, Indian agriculture is characterised by rise of Middlemen like Moneylenders, Traders and Zamindars who flourished by exploiting the poor peasant, tenant or agricultural labour by means of usury, exploitation and tyranny thereby contributing to their pauperization. This distorted form of Production Relations, MOP and commercialization seems to be conducive to Peasant Mobilisation.
- Post-Independence- Peasant Movements and protests focused on effective implementation of Land Reforms and Equitable Distribution of land (Zamindari Abolition/Ceiling legislations). Sharecroppers/Tenants/AL exerted their rights over land which they cultivated. Distribution of equal land to all the cultivators was one of the central issues in Telangana Movement, Land Grab and Naxalite Movement, Bhoodan Movement.
- **Hamza Alavi** analysed Peasant Participation and Leadership in Chinese and Russian revolutions, Tebhaga and Telangana movement. He argues that Middle Peasants who are somewhat economically independent of Upper-Class/Upper-Caste landlords have greater potential than other peasant classes to play a revolutionary role. Agricultural Proletariat or poor peasants are initially the least Militant class because of their dependence on Landlords/Rich Peasants/ Masters. (-gives him land to cultivate –credit –Paternalistic ties and helps in time of crisis). However, when Anti-Landlord and Anti-rich peasant sentiments are build up by militancy of Middle Peasants, the morale of

Agricultural Proletariat is raised thereby setting their revolutionary energies into motion. He gives the example of Telangana and Tebhaga movements which were initially middle-class peasant movements and sharecroppers were drawn into the movements at the later stage.

- **Dhanagare** disagrees with Alavi. He argues that Middle Class Peasants has less solidarity than other peasants. It is a transitional category with its inflows and outflows as it is subjected to pressures of Poverty and Pauperisation. He shows that Telangana movement had a mixed class character. However, the main participants in the sustained revolt were unquestionably the poor peasants, sharecroppers and landless labourers.

Farmers' Movements/New Farmers' Movements

- **Dhanagare** differentiates between Peasant Movements and Farmers' Movements. He observes that the issues of PMs were implementation of land reforms, redistribution of surplus land etc. It espoused the causes of Landless labourers and other marginal sections of the peasantry, eg. Demand to increase minimum wages. On the other hand, farmers' movements are generally dominated by rich and middle farmers and aim at increasing the Market Profitability of the farmer by protesting for an increase in output prices (Assured MSP) and lowering of Input costs. (A farmer is someone who owns and manages the farm and produces for the market with the aim of maximizing profit).
- FMs emerged in 1970s in the aftermath of Green Revolution with the rise of a new category of rich and middle farmers and specially the Middle Peasantry which **Rudolph and Rudolph** call as **Bullock Capitalists**. They constituted the Dominant castes and were politically organized and mobilized as Pressure Groups/Interest Groups thereby extracting various concessions from the state.
- **Ramachandra Guha** terms FMs as Old Kulak/Rich Peasant Mobilisations and is essentially a class movement because it benefits primarily the Big or Rich farmers even though it claims to represent the interests of all class of farmers.
- Major Demands-->
 - Lower prices or extension of state subsidies on inputs like Seeds, Pesticides and Fertilisers
 - Abolition of taxes on agricultural incomes
 - Lower tariffs on Electricity
 - Farm Loan Waivers
 - Reduction of rate of interest on credit
 - Higher output prices (assured MSP)

-Crop Insurance

-Increase of Public Investment and Budgetary allocations in Agriculture and reduction of discrepancy between Agriculture and Industry. All these demands are directed against the state.

- **Dipankar Gupta** emphasises the non-class nature of FMs. Rural agitations are no longer between the agricultural labourers/proletariat and the landlords. With the shift in nature of contradictions, the chief adversary has also changed and is no longer local but supra-local (eg. State govt.) or even the GOI.
- **Lindberg** also argues that the basic contradictions in FMs is between the state and the Peasantry instead of Peasantry and Local Landlords characteristic of traditional PM.
- Post Green Revolution the assertive and prosperous class of farmers have organized themselves into farmers' unions who constitute the PGs/IGs extracting various concessions from the state. These are:
 - 1) Shetkari Sangathan of Maharashtra led by Sharad Joshi.
 - 2) Bharatiya Kisan Union in U.P led by Mahendra Singh Tikait.
 - 3) Karnatka Rajya Ryota Sangha led by M.D Nanjundaswamy.
- With the rise of GR, capitalist transformation of Indian agriculture, penetration of market economy and onset of LPG, the peasant struggles have undergone a significant change.
- **Sharad Joshi** initiated the **Bharat v/s India debate**. He argued that the state maintained agricultural prices at an artificial low level in order to provide cheap food and raw material (or agricultural commodities) to the urban areas. Farmers are exploited by Urban interests and are victims of **Internal Colonisation**. Therefore, farmers are well within their rights to demand cheaper electricity, loan waiver, subsidized inputs as they have already paid for them by underselling their produce. Quote - "Black Britishers have replaced the white ones to the benefit of Bombay rather than that of Manchester". Bharat depicts the rural society practicing agriculture (Under-Development, Satellite) whereas India depicts the Urban society engaged in Industry or services (Development, Metropolis). By propagating these arguments, the leaders were aiming at Identity Construction (Identity of a rural Bharatiya) thereby homogenizing the rural masses cutting across class, caste, ethnic, gender and religious lines. He argues that the Real contradiction is not within the village, not between Big Peasants and small, not between landowners and the landless but between Agrarian population as a whole and the rest of the society.
- **Methods of Agitation:** - Lindberg argues that agitations carried out by FMs have close resemblance with the Civil Disobedience movement (generally non-violent)
 - Massive Demonstrations involving lakhs of farmers (Dharnas, sit-ins).
 - Blocking the Roads and Highways (Rasta Roko)

- Rail Roko
- Barring the entry of Politicians and Govt. officials into the village (Gavband).
- Gherao of Govt. Buildings (Parliament).
- Refusal to sell farm produce in mandis leading to sharp price rise.
- Tractor rallies.
- Local Singers (Inspirational songs).
- **Assadi** argues that FMs in India is a signal of growing Agrarian Crisis in India emanating from two major sources of transformation i.e. GR and forces of LPG unleashed by World bank and IMF that dictated India's Structural Adjustment Programme (conditional). LPG led to acute agrarian distress, farm suicides etc. WTO also promoted free trade regime and dilution of subsidies and put the Indian farmer directly in competition with farmers of developed countries. He analyses:
 - Unlike the earlier struggles which were about Land, Market and Prices have become the most important issues.
 - Protests are directed against the state and its collusion with National capital/International capital.
 - New Movements bring together or Homogenise entire rural populations cutting across caste, class and religious lines.
 - Emphasis is on communitarian life, maintaining traditional and cultural identity, Collectivism and against the threats of dilution of culture and identity due to aggression of Modernity, Globalisation, Westernisation, and rampant Individualism and Urbanisation.
- FMs are against powerful MNCs (Eg. Monsanto) and their negative impact on Indian economy, health, culture and biodiversity (Against BT crops and Anti-GM stance).
- Skepticism of Contract Farming as it decreases the autonomy of the farmers, neglects traditional farming techniques and farmers are virtually reduced to mere tenants.
- FMs criticize the Step Motherly attitude of State towards Agriculture (declining public investment) and various favours/stimulus/financial packages extended to Industry or services.
- Protest against Land Acquisition projects (Development induced Displacement) and diversion of fertile agricultural land for Industrial purposes. Eg. Developmental projects, SEZs, Industrial corridors etc.
- Against import of foreign agricultural products (WTO free trade regime) hurting the interests of Native Indian farmers.
- They develop close linkages and alliance with Environmental movements and Tribal movements. These movements are Anti-state, Anti-globalisation and against the expansionist Western Capitalism and involves Environmental, gender and developmental questions. Eg. Tribal movements launched for demand of community

rights over Land, Forest and Water (Jal, Jangal aur Jameen- Anti-Corporate, Anti-state – outcome is FRA).

- **Gail Omvedt/Tom Brass** categorise these movements as New Farmers' movements and differentiate them from Old Farmers' movements:
 - Political Neutrality to establish credibility.
 - Political Action initiated by non-party org. and inspired by populist Kisan Ideology.
 - Non-class and Non-institutional in nature.
 - Adhocism, Informality and Flexibility i.e. No fixed membership, no fixed rules of organization and no hierarchy. Anyone can participate in the agitation.

Farm Laws and Protests

- Farmers' protests are New farmers' Movements/Farmers' movements and therefore all the arguments of the previous topic are applicable here.
- **Sudha Narayan** - The GOI enacted three legislations to open up the farming sector (or ensure liberalization of the Agricultural Sector) to an increased commercial engagement by the private players and big corporates who could purchase, store and even decide through contract farming what crops to produce. They were designed to fundamentally change and reorient the existing regulatory framework of Indian Agriculture. The emphasis is on deregulation and increasing integration of the farmer with the market by removing various govt. controls and restrictions.
- The three farm laws are as follows:
 1. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020 – Enables the farmers to sell their produce outside the APMC mandis. Private mandis can be set up across the country where anyone can buy produce from the farmers.
 2. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 – Provides a framework for Contract Farming where farmers can directly enter into agreements with a buyer to produce a specific crop to be purchased at a pre-fixed price.
 3. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 – seeks to remove artificial and periodic stocking limits on agricultural commodities that the govt. imposed on traders. Instead of arbitrary triggers, price triggers are to be employed only in 'exceptional circumstances'. The stocking limits can be imposed only when the prices of perishable commodities increases by 100% and non-perishables by more than 50% in last year.

- Views of the Govt:
 - The act ends the monopoly of the APMCs where licensed traders engage in cartelization and provides more choices to the farmers in terms of who to sell their produce to. More buyers means a better price for the farmer.
 - Contract Farming- Hedge against Price fluctuations/uncertainty, Technical Know-how, Cheaper Credit etc.
 - Private players will ensure development of Cold-chain infrastructure, silos and warehouses, augment Logistics and strengthen our supply-chain. It will also reduce the wastage of food (fruits,milk,vegetables,grains). India is one of the biggest food wasters in the world (report by Emerson). It will also reduce Hunger and thereby improving nutritional levels.
 - Proper Implementation of the act will unleash market energies and will boost Agricultural GDP which is stagnating due to excessive govt interventions.
 - Agricultural reforms (LPG 2.0) are essential to Doubling of Farmers' incomes. The increased incomes will be reinvested in agriculture and thereby taking Indian agriculture to new heights.
 - It will stimulate rural demand and reduce rural-urban gap (development).
 - It reduces the intervention of Middlemen and consolidates the supply chain and therefore is beneficial to both the farmer and the end consumer.

Farmers' Contentions and Antagonistic viewpoints

- Private Mandis are exempted from govt. taxes and regulations whereas APMCs will continue to attract govt. taxes and regulations. This will ensure gradual but certain demise of APMCs. The farmers will have to sell outside the APMC mandi in an unregulated area where the relatively more powerful buyers/Big players are able to dictate prices.
- Farmers apprehend that the corporates would initially offer high prices than the Arhatiyas (Licensed traders) to outbid them. This will last till the Arhatiyas wound up their shops. Once they are gone, the farmer would have no choice but to enter into contractual arrangements with the private buyers, taking advances from them and eventually getting trapped into cycles of debt. This will ultimately result in losing their lands to the corporates if not de-jure but certainly de-facto.

- Encourage Hoarding by the big players whereby they would be able to manipulate market prices to their advantage. It enables the Big players to buy large volumes and keep them in their warehouses.
- Farm laws promote **Corporatisation of Agriculture** and increasing market integration and price determination (manipulated by Big Players) would eventually lead to end of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime. (Therefore seeking legal guarantee of the MSP).
- Contract Farming- Undermines traditional knowledge, excessive dependence of farmer on the corporate, power and information asymmetry, legal disputes, diversion of land for cash crops etc.
- **Surinder Jhodka** argues that the Punjab based farmers see the new laws as an attack on their Culture and Sikh Identity, intended to destroy their communities and turn them into wage labourer and vagabonds. The farmers have shown immense courage and resilience for sustaining the movement (for a long period) despite stigmatization and labeling of them as Khalistani and Anti-National.
- Anti-Globalisation (WTO free trade regime) + Anti-State (categorized as anti-national) + Agriculture vs Industries (lack of public investment, stimulus and financial packages to Industry and services) + Assured MSP + Increase in State support and Subsidies + Anti-Western Capitalism (Against Powerful MNCs-Monsanto) + Pro-environment/biodiversity (Anti-GM) + State-Capital Nexus (Development induced development and Land Alienation) + Suscepticism of Contract Farming.
- Rasta Roko/Blocking Highways + Gherao of govt building + Tractor rallies + Punjabi Pop and folk inspirational songs + More than lakh of farmers participated.
- **Satendra Kumar** argues that Farmers' protests are characterized by mobilization of farmers across classes and castes. The protests are replete with slogans of Mazdoor-Kisan Ekta Zindabad. The protests have unified the dominant caste farmers (Jat Sikhs) and the Dalit Labourers for the cause of Kheti-Kisani. The support of Bhim Army & Dalit Youth is indicative of the emerging alliance b/w the farmers and the Dalit Labourers. Due to the agrarian stress, shrinking of average landholding size and off-farm diversification of both Jatts and Dalits, there has been a softening of class contradictions
- **Nivedita Menon** points out that the large scale participation of women in the farmers' protests is indicative of their challenge to Patriarchy and Housewife-ization.