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Bachelor of Arts (Third Year)

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Unit: 03

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PEASANT MOVEMENT:

Introduction:

Literally, a peasant is one who tills the land, who generates income out of the land owned by him.

- ✓ The Indian economy is primarily an agrarian economy. The main occupation of the majority of the people is agriculture.
- ✓ Before independence, India was a poor country and its agriculture was primitive in nature. Further feudal lords had complete domination over the lands and there was an unequal distribution.
- ✓ After independence, the governments agriculture policy evolved a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, there was a need to modernize agriculture and increase production, and on the other, bring about a uniform ownership system.
- ✓ The polices were designed to provide financial support to the landowners and in turn increase their output by assuring access to all irrigational facilities.
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- ✓ It was however only the rich and middle lass farmers, who could secure loans, invest in fertilizers and produce high yield variety seeds.

- ✓ The condition of small and marginal farmers deteriorated drastically. Further constant oppression and exploitation by the rich farmers became rampant.
- ✓ The failure of governmental measures in resolving agrarian problem has been widely recognized and admitted today.
- ✓ The land reforms and community programmes meant for promoting capitalist footing in India have only succeeded in intensifying the agrarian crisis.
- ✓ The congress government have not only failed in providing relief to the vast bulk of deficit farmers and agricultural proletariat, but its agrarian policy has aggravated their miseries.
- ✓ Consequently, Indian agrarian society is seething with discontent-even after independence.
- ✓ This has led to a series of peasants struggles in different parts of country.
- ❑ Santhal's Revolution (1855)
- ❑ Peasant Revolt in Punja (1930)
- ❑ Camparan Movement in Bihar (1917-18)
- ❑ Kheda Peasant Struggle (1918)
- ❑ The Bardoli Satyagraha (1920)
- ❑ Moplah Rebellion in Malabar (1921)
- ❑ Colonial economic policies, the new land revenue system, the colonial administrative and judicial system and the ruin of handicrafts leading to the overcrowding of land ,transformed the agrarian structure and impoverished the peasantry.
- ❑ In the vast zamindari areas the peasants were left to the mercies of the zamindar who rack-rented them and compelled them to pay illegal dues and perform beggar. In the Ryotwari areas, the government itself levied heavy land revenue. This forced the peasants to borrow money from the moneylenders.
- ❑ Gradually over large areas the actual cultivators were reduced to the status of tenants at will, share croppers and landless laborers while their lands, crops and cattle passed into the hands to landlords, trader moneylenders and such peasants.
- ❑ The depression brought agricultural prices crashing down to half of less of their normal levels dealt a severe blow to the already impoverished peasants burdened with high taxes and rents.

Changed nature of Peasant Movements after 1857

- ✓ When the peasants could take it no longer they resisted against the oppression and exploitation. Peasants emerged as the main force in agrarian movements, fighting directly for their own demands.
- ✓ The movements were directed against the immediate enemies of the peasant- foreign planters and indigenous zamindars and moneylenders
- ✓ The struggle were directed towards specific and limited objectives and redressal of particular grievance.
- ✓ The peasant developed a strong awareness of their legal rights and asserted them and outside the courts.
- ✓ The civil disobedience movement was launched in this atmosphere of discontent in 1930s and in many parts of the country it soon took on the form of no-tax and no-rent campaign.
- ✓ In Bihar and Bengal powerful movements were launched against the hated chowkidar tax by which villages were made to pay for the upkeep of their own oppressors.
- ✓ In Punjab a no-revenue campaign was accompanied by the emergence of Kisan Sabhas that demanded a reduction in land revenue and water rates and the scaling down of debts. A Kisan Manifesto was finalized at the All India Kisan Committee session in Bombay and formally presented to the Congress Working Committee.
- ✓ The formation of Congress ministries in a majority of the provinces in early 1937 marked the beginning of a new phase in the growth of the peasant movement.
- ✓ The political atmosphere in the country underwent a marked change: increased civil liberties, a new sense of freedom born of the feeling that our own people are in power.

Peasant movements at the Eve of the independence and afterwards

- ✓ Parth Nath Mukherji has made a study of Naxalbari movement and the peasant revolt in North Bengal in Darjeeling district and the regions are Phansidewa, Naxalbari and Khoribari.
- ✓ The Naxalbari peasant movement is related to the Tebhanga Movement of Bengal where the Bengali weavers were exploited.
- ✓ Leader Charu Majumdar shifted the focus from the narrow economic demands to capture of power. He wanted the annihilation of class enemies, which in effect was indistinguishable from secret assassinations. As a result he drove the movement underground.
- ✓ Ranga Rao made a study of the Peasant Movement in Telengana in the beginning of 20th century.

- ✓ Under the influence of Indian National Congress and the Arya Samaj the Telengana elite gave a new direction to the activities of the Andhra Mahasabha in the 1930.
- ✓ They mobilized the public for the abolition of forced labor, untouchability and other social evils, They also demanded equal educational and economic opportunities and equal political representation for the Hindus.
- ✓ Many of these movements have also been changed over time and exist today in some form or the other in some places of India. These movements did not have a solid and unified aim all over India and hence its nature and struggle was also different from region to region.