



Rayats Movement In Karnataka

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Abstract: *India has a long history of peasant or farmers' movement, dating back to the colonial period when farmers in different parts of India revolted against Zamindars, landlords, British colonial masters or powers including feudal lords. These movements were the results of severe exploitation, oppression, loss of rights over land, imposition of new taxes, and new agrarian relations of the peasants with the Colonial state or the feudal lords. In Karnataka the period of late 1930's together with the Post-war period 1947-50 saw the most intense politically sponsored activity among middle and poor peasants has occurred in south India. These agitations known as tenant's agitation, such as Kagodu18 Satyagraha in Karnataka during19 1950-51, Uttara-Kannada during 1950-70 etc., were carried over the issues such as forcible ejection, debts and rents it took the forms of forcible occupation of lands and sometimes culminated in violent agitations*

Key words: *Reasons for organizing Peasant revolts, Rayats Movement up to 1956, Farmers Revolt At Shiroor: 1875, Debate about Newness of New Farmers' Movement, Ideology of the Farmers' Movement*

Introduction

Farmers' movements in India, against landlordism and oppression within the rural sector, are relatively an old phenomenon. These movements were greatly instrumental in breaking the old feudal order and ushering in agricultural development on modern lines. Yet, the agrarian structure that came into being was hardly egalitarian. It is at this juncture that farmers' associations and open movements on price and related issues have dominated the Indian scene. Unlike the latter, the farmers' movements are not against oppression within the rural sector, but against what they believe to be the factors behind continuing rural underdevelopment and a relative deterioration in the income of

farmers. The study of peasant movements in general and Karnataka in particular has not received adequate attention from the profession, historians. Its study is a recent phenomenon. Many of the early historians concentrated more on the chronological picturisation of the kings and elites based on available epigraphically and literary records. There are however many significant hurdles to study peasant movements; most of the records are related to only the important sections of the society, for instance, the ruling elite. Rayats Movement in Karnataka can be traced back to 1682, when Chikkadevaraju Wodeyar had increased the land tax on the irrigated land of Kabini region. There in 1830 farmers of Bidanur region revolted



against the aggressive revenue officers. In 1950 Kaagodu farmers and tenants revolted against aggressive zamindars. In 1970 farmers of Navalagunda, Naragunda in old Dharwad District revolted against the oppressive laws of the Government. Then in 1980 farmers revolted against the government in protect against the supply of fake seeds and fake fertilizers. These revolts were mainly organized for the following reasons:

➤ **Reasons for organizing Peasant revolts**

1. Heavy taxation on lands.
2. Loss of crops due to draught and flood
3. No remission of land taxes and collection of tax by force during natural calamities.
4. Oppression of the revenue officers during tax collection
5. Acquisition of agricultural lands by the Gout. for industrial road transport.
5. Oppression of poor farmers by zagirdars and inamdars.
6. Agitation for land to the tiller.
7. Agitation for fixation of minimum prize by the Government.
8. Agitation against betterment levy and imposition of land development tax.
10. Revolt against money lenders.
9. Collection of water-tax without supplying water.
10. Agitation against unjust chess or customers levy, octopi etc.
11. Agitation against the abolition of tenancy.
12. Agitation against irregular supply of power to the pump-sets.

➤ **Rayats Movement up to 1956**

Rayats Movement (Revolt): 1682: Nanjanagudu: In the days of Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar land tax was enhanced in the irrigated areas of Kabini

river in Nanjangudu taluk. This was bitterly opposed by farmers of the area. They demanded the abolition of increased tax. At that time leaders of the farmers were invited to the large hall in Nanjangudu temple. Secretly these leaders were murdered in a conspiracy hatched by Jaina Minister Vishalaksha Pandita who was also a close friend and class- mate of Chikkadevaraja. Thus the rayats revolt was nipped in the bud.

Rayats Rebellion: 1830: Bidanur : Bidanur kingdom had been conquered by Hydar Ali and Fouzdars were appointed in that area. The Fouzdars were appressive from the beginning. Even under the Fouzdars like Veeraraja Aras, Gopalraja Aras who belonged to royal family and Shirastedars like - Thimmappaiah and Nagappaiah and others belonged to Brahmin community were highly appressive and corrupt in collecting revenue. They were also corrupt in remitting the amount to the treasury., Farmers were exploited by these officers as well as zamindars.

The farmers of Bidanur area reulted against the oppressive government in 1830. They were led by a political opportunist by name Boodi Basavaiah. Krishnaraja Wodeyar-III was unable to suppress the rebellion of the farmers. More over he could not full fill the eight demands of the farmers, led by Boodi Basavaiah, Manappa and 5 other representatives, who presented the memorandum to the Maharaja at Mysore. Eight Demands of The Farmers :-

- ✓ To abolish tenancy system by granting right to cultivate the lands in which they were cultivating.
- ✓ To return the lands sold in auction for non payment of land tax due to draught and famine.



- ✓ To wave of the loans of the farmers as well as dues.
- ✓ To distribute the waste lands among the landless farmers.
- ✓ According to the size of the family lands had to be allotted.
- ✓ To give subsidy to purchase bullocks and seeds for next five years.
- ✓ To abolish sharrat system or contract system and put an end to the exploitation of farmers.
- ✓ To cancel land tax for the next 10 years.

As these demands were unreasonable, impractical and politicised were rejected in toto. The rebellion spread to Tumkur, Chitradurga also. These farmers were supported by the farmers of Bhattarahalli in Ballary District. The rayats broke-out in revolt and attacked and looted the houses of zamindars and merchants. Many shops were burnt in Channagiri, Holehonnuru, Chikkamagalore, Hassan, Bhuvanagiri, Chandragutti and other places. Village troops were organised by the Fouzdars to curb the rebellion of farmers. Big land lords and 357 rich farmers supplied spears, swords, lathies etc., to suppress rayats, But the rebellion could not be controlled. Immediately Madras Governor S.R. Lushington ordered Maharaja to send British troops stationed at Bengaluru Contonment to Bidanur region: Corrupt Fouzdars and Shirsdedars were suspend- and in their place new officers were appointed. Krishna Rao was made Fouzdar of Bidanur and Shashagiri Rao was made the Fouzdar of Chitradurga. Rebel leaders were captured and their faces were burnt with Punju's (a kind of oiled fire stick). About 7000 farmers participated in the rebellion which resulted in loot, punder and murder. Finally they were suppressed by major

Rockfort, Major Evans, Casa Major and others. Law and order was restored in Bidanur region.

➤ **Farmers Revolt At Shiroor: 1875: Dharwad Dist :-**

This revolt was organized by the farmers against money lenders in Karade village, Shiroor taluk of Dharwad District. A rich marvadi by name Kalyanaram (Kaaluram) had given loans to not only small farmers but also zamindars and deshmuks (taluk dars). He was in the merciless habit of auctioning pledged lands and other property if the loans were not repaid in-time. Once he brought a decree or court order to auction the lands of Deshmukh Babasaheb (Karade). But no body came forward to buy the land. Therefore Kalyanram himself purchased land and house for a bid of 150 rupees. Moreover he demolished the house and forced Deshmukh to leave the village. This was not tolerated by the farmers and they revolted against the Maarwadi and throw him out of the village. They brought Deshmukh to the village.

Debate about Newness of New Farmers' Movement

There has been a debate about "Newness" of the new farmers' movement. Some of the experts working on farmers' movement argue that these movements cannot be called "new" for the simple reason that they re-enact the same old strategies, old ideas and old agenda. The protagonists of New argue on the following grounds:

That these farmers' movements do not believe in romanticising their life style or social life. λ These movements believe in the principle of going beyond locality. It is nothing but going beyond nation/nationality to internationalism λ They believe in united or undifferentiated struggle. They refuse to



divide the social categories on the basis of economic position. This is the reason why they refuse to call their movement as rich peasant movement. For them, all the social categories are poor. This is argued on the basis that the successive governments have adopted biased policies against the farmers as well as agriculture. The net consequence is the increasing poverty in the countryside. This is the reason why the farmers' movement argued that the "debt of the farmer" is nothing but artificial creation of the government. Hence they declared "Kharja Mukti". The farmers' movement believed in the single point agenda of analysing the backwardness from the perspective of remunerative prices. They believe that the remunerative prices to the agricultural commodities, if given, will have a filter-down effect. It would remove the rural poverty and backwardness. λ Gail Omvedt, who has substantially worked on the peasant movement, argues that "the farmer's movement believed in the new form of exploitation. Unlike the traditional movements these movements believed and argued that the exploitation is rooted in the larger market system. The market does not necessarily lie within its own locality rather might be outside the realm of rural areas- it might be global market or the national market" (Gail Omvedt,1998). Incidentally the Maharashtra movement distinguished itself as New Farmers' Movement with the following five characteristics:

In fact, not all the farmers' movements claim that theirs is part of New Farmers' Movement. The Karnataka movement, under Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, calls itself as "Village movement" and develops the argument centering around village issues. While Maharashtra movement claims

itself as New Farmers' movement, however, it has the problem of identifying peasant categories – it is strange that its discourse on shetkari also covers such categories as rural artisans as well as agricultural labourers.

Ideology of the Farmers' Movement

Apparently the farmers' movement did not believe in single ideology as such. This is because of the fundamental differences among themselves about addressing the issues of farmers.

The Karnataka farmers' movement claimed itself as Gandhian but few of its arguments come closer to the argument of Dependency theory. It argues that the present day retarded development of the Third World is largely due to the colonization of the Third World by the former colonial countries. This colonization is once again being pursued, even after the independence by way of cheap goods, dumping secretive technology, patent regimes, imposing restrictions on the agricultural production, developing weak capitalism, urban biased policies etc. Similar arguments have been voiced in the arguments of the Uttar Pradesh and other farmers' movements.

However, what distinguished the Maharashtra movement under Shetkari Sangathana from other movements is the "novelty of idiom and its capacity to articulation". Its ideology is apparent in its argument of "Bharat versus India" divide- they are the "native and traditional nomenclature of the country". Sharad Joshi argues that "India corresponds to that notional entity that has inherited from the British the mantle of economic, social, cultural educational exploitation; on the contrary "Bharat" is that notional entity which is subject to exploitation a second time even after the



termination of the external colonial regime. In brief, the black rulers have replaced the white rulers (Sharad Joshi, 1986, p.213). This is called a new agrarian thinking in the recent past.

Conclusion:-

The farmers' movements in India have excelled in populist philosophising. Some farmers' leaders, like Nanjundaswamy particularly, have emphasised that the price issue is only one of the many issues affecting farmers and the ultimate goal of their movement is to end capitalism of the Western type and run the economy on Gandhian principles. There is an immediate need to curb the mad rush to elitism that provides little employment and security to the masses. Mass leader like Prof. Nanjundaswamy has already given a call to his followers to avoid synthetic fabrics and wear only cottons. But there have been no corresponding moves to take up the issues concerning rural artisans and rural industries or to improve other aspects of rural life such as education and health. The fact is that farmers' movements are yet to graduate themselves into rural movements for improving the quality of life of the bulk of the rural population, let alone movements of all the deprived sections including the urban poor. Irrespective of personal convictions, it is doubtful how far Nanjundaswamy would be able to dissuade the elite farmers from emulating the life styles of the urban rich and carry them to Gandhian goals. The means adopted by the farmers' movements may well be Gandhian, but it is doubtful if the goals are.

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