



Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Peasant movements of the twentieth century in India were deeply influenced by the ongoing struggle for national freedom. Discuss the important features of these movements. (150 Words)

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Approach

- Briefly explain the change in the characteristics of peasant movements in the 20th century as compared to earlier peasant movements.
- Discuss the features of peasant movements with respect to the development of national freedom struggle.
- Discuss the role of national leaders in the formation of peasant organisation and their influence on peasant movements.
- Highlight the nature of important peasant movements in twentieth-century across India.
- Conclude the answer by summarising the overall influence of the peasant movement.

Introduction

Unlike the earlier peasant movements that arose from discontentment among the peasantry, the peasant movements in the twentieth century were influenced by national freedom struggle. This phase witnessed an increased involvement of middle-class, modern educated class in peasant resistance movements. This led to percolation of the idea of nationalism among the peasantry too.

Body

Gandhian Peasant Movements

- These movements were essentially non violent in nature. Satyagraha (fast unto death) was the defining feature of these moments to build moral pressure on britishers to accept their demands.
- **Champaran Satyagraha:** In Champaran, the peasants were agitating against the planters who were forcing the peasants to grow indigo under the exploitative **tinkathia system**. This system forced cultivation of indigo in 3/20th of land held by the peasant.
 - One of their leaders, Raj Kumar Sukul invited Gandhi to resolve the issue.
 - Gandhi led the movement by launching satyagraha and mobilised the peasantry in the area defying the British authority.
 - This satyagraha brought the tinkathia system to an end and helped in determining the rent payable by the peasants to the planters.

- **Kheda Satyagraha:** In Kheda, on the request of the local peasant leaders, Gandhi decided to support the struggle of the peasants for revenue remission in 1918.
 - Here the peasants had lost about 25 percent of their crop due to excessive rains. They wanted the land revenue installments to be suspended. They sent several petitions to the government. However, the Government was adamant on recovering its dues.
 - Gandhi supported their just demand. Although the struggle did not succeed, the government at least agreed not to confiscate the property of the non-paying peasants.
 - **Bardoli Satyagraha** In Bardoli, the nationalist leadership, between 1921 and 1927, undertook the task of generating a model peasant movement by linking the local peasant discontent with the larger problem of nationalism.
 - The issue was the periodic upward revision of land revenue without paying attention to the ground situation.
 - Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel mobilised the peasants and sustained the movement. The government tried to forcibly collect the entire revenue but failed to do so. Finally, a compromise was reached and the revenue demand was lowered.

Peasantry during Non Cooperation movement

- **Organisation of Kisan Sabhas:** In the Awadh region, a powerful peasant movement developed under the leadership of Baba Ramachandra. This movement gained momentum when Ramachandra was arrested and the Congress leaders, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru, became involved.
- **The Moplah Rebellion** was an extension of the Khilafat Movement in Kerala in 1921. The Government had declared the Congress and Khilafat meetings illegal. So, a reaction in Kerala began against the crackdown of the British.
But soon the Muslims peasants, known as Moplahs, were polarised against Hindu and numerous communal riots outbreak from 1921 onwards.
- **The Eka Movement** was started in 1921 in Awadh region. The initial thrust was given by the leaders of Congress and the Khilafat movement. The main reason for the movement was high rent, which was generally higher than 50% of recorded rent in some areas.
When leadership was passed on to Madari Pasi, he was reluctant to accept non-violence. This led the movement to lose contact with nationalist class. It gradually ended in 1922.

Peasantry during Civil Disobedience movement

- **Emergence of radical leadership:** The launch of the Civil Disobedience movement in such an atmosphere brought a very large number of peasants within the ambit of the nationalist movement.
 - **No-rent and no-revenue campaigns** in various parts of the country were taken up by the peasant leaders.
 - A new generation of radical leadership committed to the peasant movements emerged from among the Congress left wing and the communists.
 - Leaders like **Swami Sahajanand, N.G. Ranga, Indulal Yagnik** and many others became prominent in mobilisation of peasantry.
- **Formation of All India Kisan Sabha:** In 1936, at the Lucknow session of the Congress, All India Kisan Sabha was formed with Sahajanand as its first president.
 - It later issued a Kisan manifesto which demanded abolition of zamindari and occupancy rights for all tenants.
 - Under pressure from its socialist members and leaders, the Congress adopted an Agrarian Programme in December 1936.

Peasant movement during Quit India Movement

In this movement all sections of peasants, cutting across caste lines, and even many landlords supported the movement believing that the British rule was at an end.

- **Tebhaga Movement:** The communist-led Bengal Kisan Sabha prepared the ground for the widespread Tebhaga movement in 1946 which continued for about a year before being suppressed by the government and the landlords.
- **Abolition of Zamindari:** During the 1940s, the Congress accepted the idea of zamindari abolition on a larger level. In its election manifesto of 1946, it proposed that landlordism would be abolished after paying an equitable compensation to the landlords.

Conclusion

Thus, the rise of nationalism, formation of congress and emergence of Gandhi helped to redefine the peasant movements in the twentieth century. The idea of a nation spread by the nationalist movement played a big role in raising the consciousness of the peasantry and created the basis for their assimilation in the freedom struggle. It encouraged the localised peasant movements to assume national character and significance.