



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Discuss various peasant movements, and their impact, that took place during Indian freedom struggle. (250 words)

07 Feb, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

### Approach:

- Write general causes of peasant revolt during colonial period.
- Discuss the important peasant movements.
- Discuss their impacts on the peasants, zamindars, British government and India.

### Introduction:

- Peasant movement in India arose during the British colonial period, when economic policies resulted in the ruin of traditional handicrafts and other small industries leading to change of ownership and overburdening of agrarian land, and massive debt and impoverishment of peasantry.
- The economic policies of British government used to protect the landlords and moneylenders and exploited the peasants. The peasants rose in revolt against this injustice on many occasions

### Body

#### Peasants revolt before Gandhian phase-

- **Indigo revolt of 1859-1860:** European planters persuaded the peasants to plant indigo instead of food crops. They provided loans at a very high interest. The price paid by the planters was meagre, only 2.5% of the market price. The farmers were totally unprotected from the indigo planters, who resorted to mortgages or destruction of their property if they were unwilling to obey them. Under this severe oppression, the farmers resorted to revolt.
- **Pabna movement:** Some lords forcefully collected rents and land taxes, often enhanced for the poor peasants and also prevented the tenants from acquiring Occupancy Right under Act X of 1859. Due to the decline in the production of Jute in the 1870s, the peasants were struggling with famine. Some of the lords declared an enhancement of land taxes and that triggered the rebellion.
- **Deccan Riots:** In May and June 1875, peasants of Maharashtra in some parts of Pune, Satara and Ahmednagar districts revolted against increasing agrarian distress. The rioters' specific purpose was to obtain and destroy the bonds, decrees, and other documents in the possession of the moneylenders.

#### During Gandhian phase-

- **Champaran Satyagraha (1917):** The European planters resorted to all sorts of illegal and inhuman methods of indigo cultivation. The peasants were not only exploited by the European planters but also by the local zamindars. It was in such a situation that Gandhiji took up their cause and launched the movement.
- **Moplah Rebellion 1921 in Malabar:** The Moplah tenants agitated against the Hindu landlords

and the British government. Most of their grievances were related to security of tenure, high rents, renewal fees, and other unfair exactions of the landlords.

- **Other significant movements:** Almost all the movement like Kheda Peasant Struggle, Bardoli Movement in Gujarat, Peasant Revolt in Telangana, and Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, were against the oppressive British government and Zamindars.

### Impacts of these movements:

- **Awareness among the Indians:**
  - Though these revolts were not aimed at uprooting the British rule from India, they created awareness among the Indians
  - The peasants developed a strong awareness of their legal rights and asserted them in and outside the courts.
- **Inspired other revolt:** They felt a need to organise and fight against exploitation and oppression. In short, these rebellions prepared the ground for various other uprisings such as Sikh Wars in Punjab and finally the Revolt of 1857.
- **Peasants' voices were heard:** Peasants emerged as the main force in agrarian movements, fighting directly for their own demands.
  - The Government appointed an indigo commission to inquire into the problem of indigo cultivation. Based on its recommendations, the Government issued a notification in November 1860 that the ryots could not be compelled to grow indigo and that it would ensure that all disputes were settled by legal means.
  - The Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act was passed in 1879.
  - Various Kisan Sabhas were formed to organise and agitate for peasants demands during Non Cooperation Movement.
- **Growth of nationalism:** The Champaran Agrarian Act was assented by the Governor-General of India on 1 May 1918. The ideology of non-violence had given much strength to the peasants who participated in the movement. The movement also contributed to the growth of nationalism.

### Conclusion

- These movements created an atmosphere for post- independence agrarian reforms, for instance, 'abolition of Zamindari.
- They eroded the power of the landed class, thus adding to the transformation of the agrarian structure.