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Tribal Rebellion on the Question of Peasant Consciousness

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Abstract:

The peasant society of India has repeatedly roared in protest as a consequence of the colonial rule. The wave of protest turned into an uprising. In this protest and rebellion, along with the common farmers, the people of the tribal community also played an equal role. But as the rebellion of the tribals and marginal peasants who participated in the peasant struggles was spontaneous, the wave of rebellion spread over a wide area. The insurgents fought from within the inaccessible jungles with the shelter of tactical warfare. Again, in many such revolts, the spark of rebellion was spread from discontent and protest. Such a struggle, however, is not compatible with nationalist movements. As the boundaries of these movements did not extend to vast areas of India like the nationalist movements, the duration of the movements was also short-lived. More than that, regardless of the spontaneous role the peasants took in such revolts, the extent to which the consciousness of the peasantry influenced these revolts remains a question. Different groups have different views on the development of peasant consciousness in peasant revolts. Historians belonging to the lower classes did not want to emphasize the spirit of the peasant revolt. A semblance of consciousness must be observed in some cases in such debates as well as rebellions. So this article will try to discuss the thoughts related to the development of consciousness of the farmers.

Keywords: Marginal Peasant, Protest, Rebellion, Consciousness, Lower Class

Introduction:

Revenue system was at the core of the issues that usually arose in tribal peasant revolts. A number of movements arose in marginal areas towards colonial India. Many such movements can naturally be named in this context. Even then we will discuss Rampa Rebellion, Kuka Rebellion, Mopla Rebellion, Munda Rebellion etc. as tribal rebellions. First let's see about Rampa rebellion. A great peasant uprising took place at Rampa on the banks of the Godavari River in Madras. At the root of this rebellion was the British revenue system and its consequent repression. Instead of demanding common farmers, the revenue rate was doubled. Not only that, grazing land and firewood

were also taxed. Even farmers had to pay taxes to brew alcohol at home. But they had no way to protest. The law courts were the ally of the government. Therefore, as a means of self-defense, farmers are forced to take the law into their own hands. It is better to die by fighting back than by being beaten like this.

Suba Reddy came forward to lead the Rampa Rebellion (1858). At this time the wave of rebellion was spreading across the country and on his sources Rampa rebellion was involved in the rebellion. That is why we find Suba Reddy saying to embolden the rebels, “Dada Saheb will come and a new kingdom will be established”.¹ However, such protests by Suba Reddy did not escape the notice of the British Government. Subba Reddy was soon arrested and hanged along with seven of his companions. Suba Reddy's death did not stop Rampa's revolt, but gained momentum. In 1879 the main Rampa Rebellion started. This time (in March), the residents of the hilly areas came together and presented their complaints to the Sub Collector. The collector tries to fool them with good words. Not satisfied with that, the rebels opened fire on the Magistrate's camp. Even captured two constables and brought them to the village. The two constables were sacrificed in front of their holy shrine, which enlivened the rebels. In a new initiative, the insurgents spread their movement to the mountainous areas. The rebels hid in the mountains and jungles and looted in guerilla style. Government treasury, police station loot, court office burned. They even set fire to one of the two ships sent down the Godavari river route to quell the rebellion.² But the movement was put down by a very severe policy of repression.

Another peasant revolt at this time greatly alarmed the British power. Between 1863-71 the Kuka Rebellion became stronger in some districts of the Punjab. Ramsingh of Bhaini village came forward to lead this Kuka revolt. Ramsingh was not an adivasi by caste, but was a sutradhar and a mason by profession. He had some command of Gurmukhi language. The tribal touch in the Kuka Rebellion was mainly through Ramsingh's disciples. And most of the disciples were the so-called untouchables—chamars, irons, etc. Kuka's movement will be particularly political. Because they thought that British rule in India would not last. Rather, peace and justice will return to India once Sikh rule is re-established. In the new regime, one-fifth of the peasants' work would be taken as revenue. But such thinking did not sit well with British rule. Not only that, there were some chieftains in their rebellion who were closely involved with the Great Rebellion. Identified as a fugitive of the Great Mutiny to the British. But due to their courtesy, the rebellion of Kuka became strong enough. The British government sought tactics to suppress the movement. When the Kukas tried to run the local administration like themselves, the British had to step in. Ramsingh therefore seized the opportunity and was deported to Brahmadesh as a Regulation Three prisoner, where he died.³

If we review these tribal revolts that took place in the middle of the 19th century, we can

see that they were strong resistance against the colonial rule, spontaneous uprisings of peasants oppressed by exploitation. Although spontaneous, this rebellion is not worth less. Because there is some semblance of consciousness in the revolts.⁴ It is seen that these revolts sought to deal with several problems arising from life. Not only that, the rebellions brought to light the various aspects of the oppression of the colonial rule. Brought before the eyes the problems of revenue increase and eviction, beggar system, moneylender oppression, famine. It must be remembered that such revolts by the tribals cannot be called blind revolts. These revolts were guided by common sense.⁵ It is seen that Hindu and Muslim peasants fought hand to hand. They understood that unity is strength. If they keep differences between themselves by using religion, they will be harmed. In tribal revolts, tribals such as the Kols, Santals formed strong alliances with the poor, as did the so-called lower castes of Hindu society. So it is not right to over-idealize these rebellions. There is certainly a semblance of consciousness here.

Again it is seen that all these rebellions were regional rebellions. Because of the uprising in Mysore in the 1830s, the Kols in Bihar staged major revolts, Titumir fought against the British in Bengal. But they never thought of communicating with each other. But in the middle of the 19th century, during 1860-75, numerous peasant revolts took place across the country. Among the revolts were the revolts of tribal and tribal people. But each was separate from the other. The insurgents have resorted to guerilla warfare, opting for impenetrable jungles. Barricades have been created to block the entry of the army. Although their all-out protest and movement was manifested with considerable bravery, they could not stand up to the British army equipped with modern weapons. Their helplessness is evident this time. Their defeat was inevitable. So however valiant they may have been, the power of these rebellions was limited. The revolts were never likely to rise to the level of a national rebellion.⁶

However, there is considerable historical controversy over the nature of such rebellions by indigenous peoples. In the eyes of lower-class historians working with ordinary people, however, such movements were national struggles. They even want to call such revolts as class-struggle.⁷ But such thinking does not fit with tribal movements. Although a movement of the lower classes, it had certain elements of class warfare which cannot be denied. But even so there was no class predominance in these rebellions, there was predominance of caste, tribe, clan etc. In other words, from the nature point of view, this movement can be called an old type of peasant revolt. Farmers took up such movements to protect their own rights. There was a need to awaken the consciousness among the peasants about their own country, which was not seen that way among the peasants at that time. Later this consciousness came to them. But it came from outside.

Thus we find that the peasant consciousness, though it did not emerge as such in the tribal peasant uprisings, was certainly modified by the outside world, i.e., the national movements of the

civilized educated society. The nationalist spirit that arose in the naval mutiny had a considerable influence on the peasant rebels. Many times it has also been seen that many leaders came forward to join the movement of the common people from the so-called national movement. The experience of the Sepoy Mutiny instilled an anti-colonial spirit among the country's middle classes. The educated middle class in states like Bengal, Maharashtra etc. are becoming increasingly aware not only of national problems but also of peasant problems. Even the national newspapers took up the pen. For example, it can be said that Fadke left the British government job in Maharashtra and formed a group with the poor castes for the purpose of British eviction. For this crime, however, Fadke was captured and exiled to Aden.⁸ He died there.

Another such peasant movement was the anti-moneylender movement in the Deccan. The movement of tribals like Bhil, Koli etc. caused the government proper distraction during this period. However, there was considerable difference between their movement and the movement of the so-called tribals. In the kind of movement that the Bhils and the Kolis did, their main opposition was the moneylender class. Mainly due to the repressive policies of the moneylenders, the tribal people became enraged. The rebels attacked the moneylenders on sight. The movement first started on May 12, 1875 in a village called Supa in Puna. That day the local mob attacked the house of the Gujarati 'Sahukars'. Looted their shops and set fire to their houses. Around the same time large public gatherings were organized in the taluks included in Ahmad Nagar and attacks on moneylenders took place. The government is resorting to strict repression policy.

Similarly, in a village of Satara, over a hundred rioters attacked the house of a Gujarati sahuakar, looted the property, set fire to the house, collected all the documents kept in the house and burnt them all. Such main reasons are oppression of moneylenders, exorbitant rates of interest, unilateral judgments in courts, laws passed in favor of moneylenders. However, the government's fiscal policy was also inextricably linked with this revolt. The rate of government revenue caused the ruin of the common farmers. Certain features must be noticed in the nature of such agitations of farmers. The main targets of riots were documents related to debt bonds or court judgments. If they fell into the hands of the rebels, they would burn them.

Wedderburn, a high-ranking bureaucrat in the contemporary Bombay province, describes this rebellion from his own experience. According to him, the main reason for this movement was the fiscal policy of the government. The Riots felt that they did not get justice from the government, the kings of the past were some good, some bad, those who were good took a small share of our harvest, those who were bad took a large share. But God has never sent such a government, which wants to take the crops even though we have no crops in our house.⁹ Not only that, the farmers were dependent on the moneylenders for not being able to pay the revenue. Moneylenders took full advantage of this. Tired of being exploited by the moneylenders, the farmers chose the extreme path.

In this case they used to personally attack the moneylenders first. They used to rob and loot. Gradually they became so violent that the government had to employ the military to suppress them. But many times even the government forces could not bring all these angry people to bay. Because geographically the Western Ghats were very inaccessible. It could hide there and spread easily to convenient places. Later, however, an educated leader emerged among them who proclaimed himself 'Second Shivaji' and said that he would reward him with Rs 500 if anyone could capture the Governor.¹⁰

Conclusion:

Needless to say, some early attempts to reach out to such peasant and middle-class tribals were immature. Later on, the Gandhian movement led to a change in the consciousness of the common people and the tribals and joined the national movement. But the driving force of this movement is the bourgeoisie motivated by nationalistic spirit and indifferent to the value of the peasantry. So tribal farmers joined this movement but could not get much encouragement. Later, when the 'Krishaksabha' was formed under the initiative of the communists, the tribal farmers were encouraged to some extent. Because it has been seen that the movement started under the leadership of Krishaksabha with the basic demands of the farmers. Among the lower class people who were more politically conscious, they rallied under the banner of Krishaksabha.

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