

CONTRIBUTION OF VARIOUS SECTION OF INDIAN SOCIETY

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Peasant Movement in India

Historically the peasant movements in India can broadly be grouped in the following three distinct phases:

1. **The Initial Phase (1857-1921):** This phase was characterized by the sporadic growth of peasant movements in the absence of proper leadership.
2. **The Second Phase (1923-1946):** This phase was marked by the emergence of the class conscious peasant organizations. Its distinct feature was that during this period peasant movements were led by people who gave priority to kisan problems in the struggle for national liberation.
3. **Post-Independence Phase:** This era witnessed the uninterrupted continuity of the agrarian movements due to the failure of the ruling party to resolve any of the basic problems of the toiling masses in rural India. The peasant struggles in this period were led predominantly by left political parties like the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the Socialist Party (SP) through their kisan organisations.

The Initial Phase

The tyranny of zamindars along with the exorbitant rates of British land revenue led to a series of spontaneous peasant uprisings in different parts of the country during this period. The periodic recurrence of famines coupled with the economic depression during the last decades of the 19th century further aggravated the situation in the rural areas and consequently led to numerous peasant revolts. The following were the notable agrarian movements of this phase:

Indigo Revolt (1859-60)

The Indigo revolt of Bengal was directed against British planters who forced peasants to take advances and sign fraudulent contracts which forced the peasants to grow Indigo under terms which were the least profitable to them. The revolt began in Govindpur village in Nadia district, Bengal and was led by Digambar Biswas and Bishnu Biswas who organised the peasants into a counter force to deal with the planters lathiyals (armed retainers).

In April 1860, all the cultivators of the Barasat subdivision and in the districts of Pabna and Nadia resorted to strike. They refused to sow any indigo. The strike spread to other places in Bengal. The revolt enjoyed the support of all categories of the rural population, missionaries and the Bengal intelligentsia.

This was vividly portrayed by Din Bandhu Mitra in his play, Neel Darpan enacted in 1869. It led to the appointment of an Indigo Commission in 1860 by the government by which some of the abuses of Indigo cultivation was removed.

Pabna Movement (1872-76)

In East Bengal the peasantry was oppressed by zamindars through frequent recourse to ejection, harassment, arbitrary enhancement of rent and use of force. The zamindars also tried to prevent them from acquiring the occupancy rights under the Act of 1859.

In May 1873 an Agrarian League was formed in the Yusufzahi Pargana of Pabna district (East Bengal). Payments of enhanced rents were refused and the peasants fought the zamindars in the courts. Similar leagues were formed in the adjoining districts of Bengal. The main leaders of the Agrarian League were Ishan Chandra Roy, Shambu Pal and Khoodi Mullah. The discontent continued till 1885 when the Government by the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 enhanced the occupancy rights.

The Deccan Peasants' Uprising (1875)

The Deccan peasants uprising was directed mainly against the excesses of the Marwari and Gujarati money lenders. Social boycott of moneylenders by the peasants was later transformed into armed peasant revolt in the Poona and Ahmadnagar districts of Maharashtra. The peasants attacked the moneylender's houses, shops and burnt them down.

Their chief targets were the bond documents, deeds and decrees that the money lenders held against them. By June 1875 nearly a thousand peasants were arrested and the uprising completely suppressed. The Government appointed the Deccan Riots Commission to investigate into the causes of the uprising. The ameliorative measure passed was the Agriculturists Relief Act of 1879 which put restrictions on the operations of the peasants land and prohibited imprisonment of the peasants of the Deccan for failure to repay debts to the moneylenders.

Punjab Peasants Discontent (1890-1900)

Rural indebtedness and the large scale alienation of agricultural land to non-cultivating classes led to the peasant discontent in Punjab. The communal complexion of the Punjab rural situation and the martial character of the Sikhs called for an early effective action by the government. The Punjab Land Alienation Act, 1900 was passed which prohibited the sale and mortgage of lands from peasants to moneylenders. The Punjab peasants were also given partial relief against oppressive incidence of land revenue demand by the Government and it was not to exceed 50% of the annual rental value of land.

Champaran Satyagraha (1917)

The peasantry on the indigo plantations in the Champaran district of Bihar was excessively oppressed by the European planters. They were compelled to grow indigo on at least 3/20th of their land (tinkathia system) and to sell it at prices fixed by the planters.

Accompanied by Babu Rajendra Prasad, Mazhar -ul-Huq, J.B. Kripalani, Narhari Parekhand Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji reached Champaran in 1917 and began to conduct a detailed inquiry into the condition of the peasantry.

The infuriated district officials ordered him to leave Champaran, but he defied the order and was willing to face trial and imprisonment. Later the Government developed cold feet and appointed an Enquiry Committee (June 1917) with Gandhiji as one of the members. The ameliorative enactment, the Champaran Agrarian Act freed the tenants from the special imposts levied by the indigo planters.

Kaira/Kheda Satyagraha (1918)

The Kaira (Kheda) campaign was chiefly directed against the Government. In 1918, crops failed in the Kheda districts in Gujarat but the government refused to remit land revenue and insisted on its full collection. Gandhiji along with Vallabhai Patel supported the peasants and advised them to withhold payment of revenues till their demand for its remission was met. The satyagraha lasted till June 1918. The Government had to concede the just demands of the peasants.

Kisan sabha Movement

After the 1857 revolt, the Awadh taluqdars had got their land. This strengthened the hold of taluqdars or big land lords over the agrarian society of province. The majority of the cultivators were subjected to high rents, summary evictions (bedakhali), illegal levies, renewal fees or nazrana. The First World War had hiked the prices of food and the other necessities. This worsened the condition of UP peasants.

Mainly due to the efforts of home rule activists, kisan sabhas were organized in UP. The UP kisan sabha was set up in February 1918 by Gauri Shankar Mishra and Indra Narayan Dwivedi. Madan Mohan Malviya supported their efforts. By June 1919, the UP kisan sabha had 450 branches. Other prominent leaders included Jhinguri Singh, Durgapal Singh and Baba Ramchandra. In June 1920, Baba Ramchandra urged Nehru to visit these villages. During these visits, Nehru developed close contact with the villagers.

In October 1920, the Avadh Kisan Sabha came into existence because of differences in nationalist ranks. The Awadh kisan sabha asked the kisans to refuse to till bedakhali land, not to offer hari or beggar (forms of unpaid labour), to boycott those who did not accept these conditions and to solve their disputes through panchayats.

From the earlier form of mass meetings and mobilization, the patterns of activity changed rapidly in January 1921 to the looting of bazaars, houses, granaries and clashes with the police. The centers of activity were primarily the districts of Rai Bareilly, Faizabad and Sultanpur.

The movement declined soon, partly due to government repression and partly because of the passing of the Awadh Rent (Amendment) Act.

Eka Movement

Towards the end of 1921, peasant discontent resurfaced in some northern districts of United Province – Hardoi, Bahraich, Sitapur. The issue involved were:

- High rents – 50% higher than recorded rates.
- Oppression of tikhedars in-charge of revenue collection, and
- Practice of share rents.

The meetings of the Eka or the unity movement involved a symbolic religious ritual in which the assembled vowed that they would

- Pay only the recorded rent but would pay it on time
- Not leave when evicted

- Refuse to do forced labour
- Give no help to criminals
- Abide by panchayat decisions

The grassroots leadership of the eka Movement came from Madari Pasi and other low-caste leaders, and many small zamindars.

By March 1922, severe repression by authorities brought the movement to an end.

Moplah Rebellion (1921)

In August 1921, peasant discontent erupted in the Malabar district of Kerala. Here Moplah (Muslim) tenants rebelled. Their grievances related to lack of any security of tenure, renewal fees, high rents, and other oppressive landlord exactions.

In 1920, the Khilafat Movement took over the tenant rights agitation (which had been going on in the Malabar region since 1916) after the Congress Conference held at Manjeri in April 1920. The arrest of established leaders of the Congress and the Khilafat movement left the field clear for radical leaders.

In the first stage of the rebellion, the targets of attack were the unpopular jenmies (landlords), mostly Hindu, the symbols of Government authority such as courts, police stations, treasuries and offices, and British planters.

But once the British declared martial law and repression began in earnest, the character of the rebellion underwent a definite change. It took communal tones because the class divide approximated the communal divide. The movement was severely depressed by December 1921

Changed nature of Peasants movements in 19th century after 1857

- Peasants emerged as the main force in agrarian movements, fighting directly for their own demands.
- The demands were centered almost wholly on economic issues.
- 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 grievances.
- Colonialism was not the target of these movements.
- It was not the objective of these movements to end the system of subordination or exploitation of the peasants.
- Territorial reach was limited.
- There was no continuity of struggle or long-term organization.
- The peasants developed a strong awareness of their legal rights and asserted them in and outside the courts.

Weaknesses

- There was a lack of an adequate understanding of colonialism.

- The nineteenth century peasants did not possess a new ideology and a new social, economic and political programme.
- These struggles, however militant, occurred within the framework of the old societal order lacking a positive conception of an alternative society.

The Role of the Indian National Congress in Peasant Movements

Despite the fact that the Indian National Congress came into existence in the late 19th century, it took cognizance of the peasant problems only in the second decade of the 20th century. In the initial years, the Congress laid exclusive stress on the needs of the Indian industrialist class, ignoring the urgency of agrarian problems. Its manifesto just reiterated some of the superfluous demands such as permanent settlement of land revenue and the abolition of salt tax etc. But the congress leaders remained scrupulously silent, about the problems of the vast bulk of tenants in zamindari areas during the earlier phase of the movement. With the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian political scene, the Indian National Congress experienced a metamorphosis. Its sphere of influence was extended and it assumed a mass character. The Congress formed peasant communities in rural areas and took note of peasants' grievances. However, the peasant movements initiated by the Congress were invariably restricted to seeking relief against the excessive rates of land revenue, and were in no case directed against the zamindars.

The Second Phase: Emergence of Class Conscious Organisations

In this phase emergence of independent class organisations of kisans in rural India was the most notable feature. Radical sections in the peasant movements increasingly realised that their interests were suffering against interest of the capitalists and land magnates. They felt that to protect the interests of the kisans, their own class organisations and leadership must be evolved.

Consequently, the kisan organisations came into existence in different parts of the country. The first Kisan Congress held at Lucknow in 1935 led to the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha. The programme of the Sabha reflected the aspirations and needs of the entire peasantry in agrarian India. The All India Kisan Sabha was composed of radical petty bourgeois individuals, within and outside the Indian National Congress. It was also supported and strengthened by the Congress Socialist Party and later on by the Communist Party of India. Reference can be made to some of the significant struggles launched by the Kisan Sabha in different parts of the country during the initial period of their inception. In Andhra Pradesh, it launched an anti-settlement agitation against zamindari 'zulum' in 1927. Swami Sahajanand, one of the eminent leaders and pioneers of the All India Kisan Sabha led a heroic movement for the abolition of zamindari in Bihar. A powerful struggle was initiated against the oppressive forest laws in South India in 1927.

Similarly, in UP and other parts of India agitations were launched against the tyranny of zamindars. The growth of peasant movements exercised considerable pressure on the Indian National Congress. Despite this, the Karachi Congress charter did not touch even the fringe of the peasant problem. But the political pressure of the Kisan Sabha succeeded in the Faizpur Congress and paved the way for the formulation of the Congress agrarian programme. However, the Congress could not, under the pressure of the native bourgeois grant any radical

concessions to the peasant demands, at the cost of jeopardizing the interests of zamindars. This was amply demonstrated by the performance of the Congress ministries during the short period that they were in office before independence.

In this period notable movements were:

Bardoli Satyagraha (1928)

Enhancement of land revenue by 22% in the Bardoli district of Gujarat by the British government led to the organisation of a 'No-Revenue Campaign' by the Bardoli peasants under the leadership of Vallabhai Patel. Unsuccessful attempts of the British to suppress the movement by large scale attachment of cattle and land resulted in the appointment of an enquiry committee. The enquiry conducted by Broomfield and Maxwell came to the conclusion that the increase had been unjustified and reduced the enhancement to 6.03%.

During the 1930s, the peasant awakening was influenced by the Great depression in the industrialized countries and the Civil Disobedience Movement which took the form of non-rent, no-revenue movement in many areas. Also after the decline of the active phase movement (1932) many new entrants to active politics started looking for suitable outlets for release of their energies and took to organization of peasants.

The All India Kisan Congress/Sabha

This sabha was founded in Lucknow in April 1936 with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati as the president and N.G.Ranga as the General Secretary. A kisan manifesto was issued and a periodical under Indulal Yagnik started. The AIKS and the congress held their session in Faizpur in 1936. The congress manifesto (especially the agrarian policy) for the 1937 provincial elections was strongly influenced by the AKIS agenda.

Under Congress Ministries

The period 1937-39 was the high watermark of the peasant movements and activity under the congress Provincial rule. The chief form of mobilization was through holding kisan conferences and meetings where demands were aired and resolutions were passed. Mobilisation campaigns were carried out in the villages.

Peasant Activity in Provinces

Bihar:

Sahajnand Saraswati was joined by Karyanand Sharma, Yadunandan Sharma, Rahul Sankrityayan, Panchanan Sharma, Jamun Karjiti, etc. In 1935, the Provincial Kisan Conference adopted the anti-zamindari slogan. The provincial Kisan Sabha developed a rift with the congress over the 'bakasht land' issue because of an unfavorable government resolution which was not acceptable to the sabha. The movement died out by August 1939.

Andhra:

This region had already witnessed a decline in the prestige of zamindar after their defeat by

Congressmen in elections. Anti-zamindar movements were going on in some places. Many provincial ryot associations were active. N. G. Ranga had set up, in 1933, the India Peasants' Institute. After 1936, the congress socialist started organizing the peasants. At many places, the summer schools of economics and politics were held and addressed by leaders like P.C.Joshi, Ajoy Ghosh and R.D Bhardwaj.

Kerala:

In the Malabar region, the peasants were mobilized mainly by the congress Socialist Party activists. Many 'Krashak Sanghams' (peasant organisations) came into existence. The most popular method was the marching of jaths or peasants groups to get their demands accepted. One significant campaign by the peasants was in 1938 for the amendment of the Malabar Tenancy Act, 1929.

Punjab:

The earlier peasant mobilization here had been organized by the Punjab Naujawan Bharat Sabha, the Kirti Kisan Party, the Congress and the Akalis. A new direction to the movement was given by the Punjab Kisan Committee in 1937. The main targets of the movements were the landlords of western Punjab who dominated the unionist ministry. The immediate issue taken up were resettlement of land revenue in Amritsar and Lahore and increase in water rates in canal colonies of Multan and Montgomery where feudal levies were being demanded by the private contractors. Here the peasants were on a strike and were finally able to win concessions.

The peasant activity in Punjab was mainly concentrated in Jalandhar, Amritsar, Hoshiyarpur, Lyallpur, Shaekhpura. The Muslim tenants-at-will of west Punjab and the hindu peasants of South-eastern Punjab (today's Haryana) remained largely unaffected.

Peasant activity was also organized in Bengal (Burdwan and 24 Pargana), Assam (Surma valley), Orissa, Central Provinces and NWFP.

During the Second World War

Because of a pro-War line adopted by the communists, the All India Kisan Sabha was split on communist and non-communist lines and many veteran leaders like Sahjanand, Indulal Yangnik and N.G.Ranga left the sabha. But the Kisan Sabha continued to work among the people. It did notable work during the famine of 1943.

Tebhaga Movement

The Tebhaga movement was a militant campaign initiated in Bengal by the Kisan Sabha (peasants front of Communist Party of India) in 1946. At that time share-cropping peasants (essentially, tenants) had to give half of their harvest to the owners of the land. The demand of the Tebhaga (sharing by thirds) movement was to reduce the share given to landlords to one third.

In September 1946, the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha gave a call to implement, through mass struggle, the Flood Commission recommendations of tebhaga -- two thirds' share to the

bargardars, the share-croppers also known as bagchasi or adhyar, instead of the one-half share. The bargardars worked on lands rented from the jotedars. The communist cadres, including many urban student militias went to the countryside to organise the bargardars. The central slogan was "nij khamare dhan tolo"-i.e., sharecroppers taking the paddy to their own threshing floor and not to the jotedar's house, as before, so as to enforce tebhaga.

The storm centre of the movement was north Bengal, principally among Rajbanshis- a low caste of tribal origin. Muslims also participated in large numbers. The movement dissipated soon, because of the League ministry's sop of the Bargadari Bill (which provided that the share of the harvest given to the landlords would be limited to one third of the total, but the Act was not fully implemented.), an intensified repression, the popularisation of the Hindu Mahasabha's agitation for a separate Bengal and renewed riots in Calcutta which ended the prospects of sympathetic support from the urban sections.

Telangana movement

This was the biggest peasant guerrilla war of modern Indian history affecting 3000 villages and 3 million population. The princely state of Hyderabad under Asafjahi Nizams was marked by a combination of religious-linguistic domination (by a small Urdu-speaking Muslim elite ruling over predominantly Hindu-Telugu, Marathi, Kannada-speaking groups), total lack of political and civil liberties, grossest forms of forced exploitation by deshmukhs, jagirdars, doras (landlords) in forms of forced labour (vethi) and illegal exactions.

During the war, the communist-led guerrillas had built a strong base in Telangana villages through Andhra Mahasabha and had been leading local struggles on issues such as wartime exactions, abuse of rationing, excessive rent and vethi.

The uprising began in July 1946 when a deshmukh's thug murdered a village militant in Jangaon taluq of Nalgonda. Soon, the uprising spread to Warangal and Khammam.

The peasants organised themselves into village sanghams, and attacked using lathis, stone slings and chilli powder. They had to face brutal repression. The movement was at its greatest intensity between August 1947 and September 1948. The peasants brought about a rout of the Razaqars-the Nizam's storm troopers. Once the Indian security forces took over Hyderabad, the movement fizzled out.

The Telangana movement had many positive achievement to its credit:

- In the villages controlled by guerrillas, vethi and forced labour disappeared.
- Agricultural wages were raised.
- Illegally seized lands were restored.
- Steps were taken to improve irrigation and fight cholera.
- Measures were taken to improve irrigation and fight cholera.
- An improvement in the condition of

The autocratic-feudal regime of India's biggest princely state was shaken up, clearing the way for the formation of Andhra Pradesh on linguistic lines and realising another aim of the national movement in this region.

Thus peasant movement in India 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.

Working Class Movement against British Rule in India

The beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century heralded the entry of modern industry into India. The thousands of hands employed in construction of railways were harbingers of the modern Indian working class.

Further industrialisation came with the development of ancillary industries along with the railways. The coal industry developed fast and employed a large working force. Then came the cotton and the jute industries.

The Indian working class suffered from the same kind of exploitation witnessed during the industrialisation of Europe and the rest of the West, such as low wages, long working hours, unhygienic and hazardous working conditions, employment of child labour and the absence of basic amenities.

The presence of colonialism in India gave a distinctive touch to the Indian working class movement. The Indian working class had to face two basic antagonistic forces—an imperialist political rule and economic exploitation at the hands of both foreign and native capitalist classes. Under the circumstances, inevitably, the Indian working class movement became intertwined with the political struggle for national emancipation.

Earlier Efforts

The early nationalists, especially the Moderates:

- i. Were indifferent to the labour's cause;
- ii. Differentiated between the labour in the Indian-owned factories and those in the British-owned factories;
- iii. Believed that labour legislations would affect the competitive edge enjoyed by the Indian-owned industries;
- iv. Did not want a division in the movement on the basis of classes;
- v. Did not support the Factory Acts of 1881 and 1891 for these reasons.

Thus, earlier attempts to improve the economic conditions of the workers were in the nature of the philanthropic efforts which were isolated, sporadic and aimed at specific local grievances.

- **1870:** Sasipada Banerjee started a workingmen's club and newspaper Bharat Shramjeevi.
- **1878:** Sorabjee Shapoorji Bengalee tried to get a bill, providing better working conditions to labour, passed in the Bombay Legislative Council.
- **1880:** Narain Meghjee Lokhanday started the newspaper Deenbandhu and set up the Bombay Mill and Millhands Association.
- **1899:** The first strike by the Great Indian Peninsular Railways took place, and it got widespread support. Tilak's Kesari and Maharatta had been campaigning for the strike for months.

There were many prominent nationalist leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal and G. Subramanya Aiyar who demanded better conditions for workers and other pro-labour reforms.

During Swadeshi Upsurge

Workers participated in wider political issues. Strikes were organised by Ashwini Coomarr Banerjea, Prabhat Kumar Roy Chaudhuri, Premtosh Bose and Apurba Kumar Ghosh. These strikes were organised in government press, railways and the jute industry.

There were attempts to form trade unions but these were not very successful.

Subramaniya Siva and Chidambaram Pillai led strikes in Tuticorin and Tirunelveli and were arrested.

The biggest strike of the period was organised after Tilak's arrest and trial.

During and after The First World War

The War and its aftermath brought a rise in exports, soaring prices, and massive profiteering opportunities for the industrialists but very low wages for the workers. This led to discontent among workers.

The emergence of Gandhi led to a broad-based national movement and the emphasis was placed on the mobilisation of the workers and peasants for the national cause. A need was felt for the organisation of the workers in trade unions.

International events like the establishment of a socialist republic in the Soviet Union, formation of the Comintern and setting up of International Labour Organisation (ILO) lent a new dimension to the movement of the working class in India.

The AITUC

The All India Trade Union Congress was founded on October 31, 1920. The Indian National Congress president for the year, Lala Lajpat Rai, was elected as the first president of AITUC and Dewan Chaman Lai as the first general secretary. Lajpat Rai was the first to link capitalism with imperialism—"imperialism and militarism are the twin children of capitalism".

The prominent Congress and swarajist leader C.R. Das presided over the third and the fourth sessions of the AITUC. The Gaya session of the Congress (1922) welcomed the formation of the AITUC and a committee was formed to assist it.

C.R. Das advocated that the Congress should take up the workers' and peasants' cause and incorporate them in the struggle for swaraj or else they would get isolated from the movement.

Other leaders who kept close contacts with the AITU

Andrews, J.M. Sengupta, Satyamurthy, V.V. Giri and Sarojini Naidu.

In the beginning, the AITUC was influenced by social democratic ideas of the British Labour Party. The Gandhian philosophy of non-violence, trusteeship and class-collaboration had great

influence on the movement. Gandhi helped organise the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (1918) and through a protest secured a 27.5 per cent wage hike. (Later, the arbitrator's award ensured a 35 per cent raise.)'

The Trade Union Act, 1926

The Act:

- i. Recognised trade unions as legal associations;
- ii. Laid down conditions for registration and regulation of trade union activities;
- iii. Secured immunity, both civil and criminal, for trade unions from prosecution for legitimate activities, but put some restrictions on their political activities.

Late 1920s

Strong communist influences on the movement lent a militant and revolutionary content to it. In 1928 there was a six-month-long strike in Bombay Textile Mills led by the Girni Kamgar Union.

The whole of 1928 witnessed unprecedented industrial unrest. This period also saw the crystallisation of various communist groups, with leaders like S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, P.C. Joshi, Sohan Singh Joshi etc.

Alarmed at the increasing strength of the trade union movement under extremist influence, the Government resorted to legislative restrictions. It passed the Public Safety Ordinance (1929) and the Trade Disputes Act (TDA), 1929. **The TDA, 1929**

- i. Made compulsory the appointment of Courts of Inquiry and Consultation Boards for settling industrial disputes;
- ii. Made illegal the strikes in public utility services like posts, railways, water and electricity, unless each individual worker planning to go on strike gave an advance notice of one month to the administration;
- iii. Forbade trade union activity of coercive or purely political nature and even sympathetic strikes.

Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929)

In March 1929, the Government arrested 31 labour leaders, and the three-and-a-half-year trial resulted in the conviction of Muzaffar Ahmed, S.A. Dange, Joglekar, Philip Spratt, Ben Bradley, Shaikat Usmani and others. The trial got worldwide publicity but weakened the working class movement.

nt but after 1931 there participated during 1930 in the Civil Disobedience

was a dip in the working class movement because of a split in 1931 in which the corporatist trend led by N.M. Joshi broke away from the AITUC to set up the All India Trade Union Federation. In 1935, the communists re-joined the AITUC. Now, the left front consisted of the communists, Congress socialists and the leftist nationalists like Nehru and Subhash.

Under Congress Ministries

During the 1937 elections, the AITUC had supported the Congress candidates. The Congress governments in provinces gave a fillip to the trade union activity. The Congress ministries were generally sympathetic to the workers' demands. Many legislations favourable to the workers were passed.

During and after the Second World War

Initially, the workers opposed the War but after 1941 when Russia joined the war on behalf of the Allies, the communists described the war as a "peoples' war" and supported it. The communists dissociated themselves from the Quit India Movement. A policy of industrial peace was advocated by the communists.

In the period 1945 to 1947, workers participated actively in the post-War national upsurges. In 1945, the dock workers of Bombay and Calcutta refused to load ships taking supplies to the warring troops in Indonesia.

During 1946, the workers went on a strike in support of the Naval Ratings. During the last year of foreign rule, there were strikes by workers of posts, railways and many other establishments.

Indian Capitalist and Indian National Movement

Among the various groups that participated in the national movement were several individual capitalists who joined the Congress. They fully identified with the movement, went to jails and accepted the hardships that were the lot of Congressmen in the colonial period. The names of Jamnalal Bajaj, Vadilal Lallubhai Mehta, Samuel Aaron, Lala Shankar Lal, and others are well known in this regard. There were other individual capitalists who did not join the Congress but readily gave financial and other help to the movement. People like G.D. Birla, Ambalal Sarabhai and Waichand Hirachand, fall into this category. There were also a large number of smaller traders and merchants who at various points came out in active support of the national movement. On the other hand, there were several individual capitalists or sections of the class who either remained neutral towards the Congress and the national movement or even actively opposed it.

Growth of Indian Capitalist Class

The economic development of the Indian capitalist class in the colonial period was substantial and in many ways the nature of its growth was quite different from the usual experience in other colonial countries. This had important implications regarding the class's position vis-a-vis imperialism.

First, the Indian capitalist class grew from a large independent capital base and not as junior par

Second, the capitalist class on the whole was not tied up in a subservient position with pro-imperialist feudal interests either economically or politically. In fact, a wide cross section of the leaders of the capitalist class actually argued, in 1944-45, in their famous Bombay plan (the

signatories to which were Purshottamdas Thakurdas, J.R.D. Tata, G.D. Birla, Ardeshir Dalal, Sri Ram, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, A.D. Shroff and John Mathai) for comprehensive land reform, including cooperativization of production, finance and marketing.'

Third, in the period 1914-1947, the capitalist class grew rapidly, increasing its strength and self-confidence. This was achieved primarily through import substitution; by edging out or encroaching upon areas of European domination, and by establishing almost exclusive control over new areas thus accounting for the bulk of the new investments made since the 1920s. Close to independence, indigenous enterprise had already cornered seventy two to seventy three per cent of the domestic market and over eighty per cent of the deposits in the organized banking sector.

However, this growth, unusual for a colonial capitalist class, did not occur, as is often argued, as a result or by-product of colonialism or because of a policy of decolonization. On the contrary it was achieved in spite of and in opposition to colonialism — by waging a constant struggle against colonialism and colonial interests, i.e., by wrenching space from colonialism itself.

There was, thus, nothing in the class position or the economic interest of the Indian capitalists which, contrary to what is so often argued, inhibited its opposition to imperialism.

Their ideology and strategy and attitude towards national movement

By the mid-1920s, Indian capitalists began to correctly perceive their long-term class interest and felt strong enough to take a consistent and openly anti-imperialist position. The hesitation that the class demonstrated was not in its opposition to imperialism but in the choice of the specific path to fight imperialism. It was apprehensive that the path chosen should not be one which, while opposing imperialism, would threaten its own existence, i.e., undermine capitalism itself.

Capitalist's class position vis-a-vis imperialism and vis-a-vis the course of the anti-imperialist movement, can be evaluated only after having a look at the emergence of the class as a political entity — a 'class for itself.'

Since the early 1920s, efforts were being made by various capitalists like G.D. Birla and Purshottamdas Thakurdas to establish a national level organization of Indian commercial, industrial and financial interests to be able to effectively lobby with the colonial government. This effort culminated in the formation of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in 1927, with a large and rapidly increasing representation from all parts of India. The FICCI was soon recognized by the British government as well as the Indian public in general, as representing the dominant opinion as well as the overall consensus within the Indian capitalist class.

The leaders of the capitalist class also clearly saw the role of the FICCI as being that of 'national capitalists, within the sphere of trade, commerce and industry, with the functions of a national government. In the process, most astute minds of the period in their ranks, developed a fairly comprehensive economic critique of imperialism in all its manifestations, whether it be direct appropriation through home charges or exploitation through trade, finance, currency manipulation or foreign investments, including in their sweep the now fashionable concept of unequal exchange

occurring in trade between countries with widely divergent productivity levels. The Congress leaders quite often saw their assistance as invaluable and treated their opinions and expertise on many national economic issues with respect.

The leaders of the capitalist class could clearly see the necessity of the class to effectively intervene in politics. As Sir Purshottamdas, President of FICCI, declared "We can no more separate our politics from our economics". And he opined that 'Indian commerce and industry are intimately associated with and are, indeed, an integral part of the national movement — growing with its growth and strengthening with its strength.'

However, the Indian capitalist class had its own notions of how the anti-imperialist struggle ought to be waged. It was always in favour of not completely abandoning the constitutional path and the negotiating table and generally preferred to put its weight behind constitutional forms of struggle as opposed to mass civil disobedience. This was due to several reasons.

First, there was the fear that mass civil disobedience, especially if it was prolonged, would unleash forces which could turn the movement revolutionary in a social sense (i.e., threaten capitalism itself). So, whenever the movement was seen to be getting too dangerous in this sense, the capitalists tried their best to bring the movement back to a phase of constitutional opposition.

Second, the capitalists were unwilling to support a prolonged all-out hostility to the government of the day as it prevented the continuing of day-to-day business and threatened the very existence of the class.

Further, the Indian capitalists' support to constitutional participation, whether it be in assemblies, conferences or even joining the Viceroy's Executive Council, was not simply their getting co-opted into the imperial system or surrendering to it. Rather they used all this as a forum for maintaining an effective opposition fearing that boycotting these forums completely would help 'black legs' and elements who did not represent the nation to, without any opposition, easily pass measures which could severely affect the Indian economy and the capitalist class. However, there was no question of unconditionally accepting reforms or participating in conferences or assemblies. The capitalists were to 'participate on (their) own terms,' with 'no compromise on fundamentals,' firmly rejecting offers of cooperation which fell below their own and the minimum national demands.' It was on this ground that the FICCI in 1934 rejected the 'Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms for India as "even more reactionary than the proposals contained in the White paper."

Further, however keen the capitalists may have been to keep constitutional avenues open, they clearly recognized the futility of entering councils, etc., In 1930, the FICCI (in sharp contrast to the Liberals) advised its members to boycott the Round Table Conference (RTC) stating that '... no conference ... convened for the purpose of discussing the problem of Indian constitutional advance can come to a solution ... unless such a conference is attended by Mahatma Gandhi, the capitalists did not, or has at least his approval."

want India to present a divided front at the RTC and because they knew only the Congress could actually deliver the goods.

Finally, it must be noted that for the capitalist class constitutionalism was not an end in itself, neither did it subscribe to what has often been called 'gradualism,' in which case it would have

joined hands with the Liberals and not supported the Congress which repeatedly went in for non-constitutional struggle including mass civil disobedience. The capitalist class itself did not rule out other forms of struggle, seeing constitutional participation as only a step towards the goal, to achieve which other steps could be necessary. For example, G.D. Birla, who had worked hard for a compromise leading to the Congress accepting office in 1937, warned Lord Halifax and Lord Lothian that the 'Congress was not coming in just to work the constitution, but to advance towards their goal,' and if the 'Governors and the Services' did not play 'the game' or 'in case there was no (constitutional) advance after two or three years, then India would be compelled to take direct action,' by which he meant 'non-violent mass civil disobedience.'

This brings us to the Indian capitalists' attitude towards mass civil disobedience, which was very complex. While, on the one hand, they were afraid of protracted mass civil disobedience, on the other hand, they clearly saw the utility, even necessity of civil disobedience in getting crucial concessions for their class and the nation.

When, after the mass movement had gone on for considerable time, the capitalists, sought the withdrawal of the movement and a compromise (often mediating between the Government and Congress to secure peace), they were quite clear that this was to be only after extracting definite concessions, using the movement, or a threat to re-launch it, to bargain. In their 'anxiety for peace,' they were not to surrender or 'reduce (their) demands.' The dual objective of achieving conciliation without weakening the national movement, which after all secured the concessions, was aptly described by G.D. Birla in January 1931: 'We should . . . have two objects in view: one is that we should jump in at the most opportune time to try for a conciliation and the other is that we should not do anything which might weaken the hands of those through whose efforts we have arrived at this stage.'

Further, however opposed the capitalist class may have been at a point of time to mass civil disobedience, it never supported the colonial Government in repressing it. In fact, the capitalists throughout pressurized the Government to stop repression, remove the ban on the Congress and the press, release political prisoners and stop arbitrary rule with ordinances as a first step to any settlement, even when the Congress was at the pitch of its non-constitutional mass phase. The fear of Congress militancy or radicalization did not push the capitalists (especially after the late 1920s) to either supporting imperialism in repressing it or even openly condemning or dissociating themselves from the Congress.

The Indian capitalists' attitude had undergone significant changes on this issue over time. During the Swadeshi Movement (1905-08), the capitalists remained opposed to the boycott agitation. Even during the Non-Cooperation Movement of the early '20s, a small section of the capitalists, including Purshottamdas, openly declared themselves enemies of the Non Cooperation Movement. However, during the 1930s' Civil Disobedience Movement, the capitalists largely supported the movement and refused to respond to the Viceroy's exhortations (in September 1930) to publicly repudiate the Congress stand and his offer of full guarantee of government protection against any harassment for doing so.' In September 1940,

in during the midst of Viceroy for 'granting war.'

Though, by the late 1920s, the dominant section of the Indian capitalist class began to support the Congress, the Indian national movement was not created, led or in any decisive way influenced by this class, nor was it in any sense crucially dependent on its support. In fact, it

was the capitalist class which reacted to the existing autonomous national movement by constantly trying to evolve a strategy towards it. Further, while the capitalist class on the whole stayed within the nationalist camp, it did so on the most conservative end of the nationalist spectrum, which certainly did not call the shots of the national movement at any stage.

Criticism of Indian Capitalist and reality

The relative autonomy of the Indian national movement has been repeatedly not recognized, and it has been argued that the capitalists, mainly by using the funds at their command, were able to pressurize the Congress into making demands such as a lower Rupee-Sterling ratio, tariff protection, reduction in military expenditure, etc., which allegedly suited only their class? Further, it is argued that the capitalists were able to exercise a decisive influence over the political course followed by the Congress, even to the extent of deciding whether a movement was to be launched, continued or withdrawn. The examples quoted are of the withdrawal of civil disobedience in 1931 with the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the non-launching of another movement between 1945-47.

These formulations do not reflect the reality for several reasons.

First, a programme of economic nationalism vis-à-vis imperialism, with demands for protection, fiscal and monetary autonomy, and the like, did not represent the interest of the capitalist class alone, it represented the demands of the entire nation which was subject to imperialist exploitation. Even the leftists — Nehru, Socialists, and Communists — in their struggle against imperialism had to and did fight for these demands.

Second, the detailed working out of the doctrine of economic nationalism was done by the early nationalism nearly half a century before the Indian capitalists got constituted as a class and entered the political arena and began fighting for these demands. So there was no question of the Congress being bought, manipulated or pressurized into these positions by the capitalist class.

Third, while it is true that the Congress needed and accepted funds from the business community, especially during constitutional (election) phases there is no evidence to suggest that through these funds the businessmen were able to, in any basic way, influence the party's policy and ideology along lines which were not acceptable to it independently. Even the Congress dependence on funds has been grossly exaggerated.

Gandhiji's position on capitalist support is very revealing in this context. As early as 1922, while welcoming and even appealing for support from merchants and mill owners; he simultaneously maintained that, 'whether they do so or not, the country's march to freedom cannot be made to depend on any corporation or groups of men. This is a mass manifestation. The masses are moving rapidly towards deliverance and they must move whether with the aid of the organized capital or without.

and movements, as for the capitalists' determining the course of the

there is little evidence to support this view. The Congress launched or withdrew movements based on its own strategic perceptions arising out of its understanding of the nature of the colonial state and its current postures, the organizational, political and ideological preparedness of the people, the staying power of the masses, especially when faced with repression, and so

on. It did not do so at the behest, and not even on behalf of the capitalist class. In fact, almost each time the Congress launched mass movements, e.g., in 1905-08, 1920-22, 1930, 1932 and 1942, it did so without the approval of either the capitalist class as a whole or a significant section of it. However, once the movements were launched, the capitalist class reacted to it in a complex and progressively changing fashion, as discussed above.

Quite significantly, the Indian capitalists never saw the Congress as their class party or even as a party susceptible only to their influence. On the contrary, they saw the Congress as an open-ended organization, heading a popular movement.

In fact, it was precisely the increasing radicalization of the Congress in the Left direction in the 1930s, with the growing influence of Nehru, and the Socialists and Communists within the Congress, which spurred the capitalists into becoming more active in the political field. The fear of radicalization of the national movement, however, did not push the capitalists into the 'lap of imperialism,' as predicted by contemporary radicals and as actually happened in some other colonial and semi-colonial countries. Instead, the Indian capitalists evolved a subtle, many sided strategy to contain, the Left, no part of which involved a sell-out to imperialism or imperial interests.

The capitalists also realized, that 'A consistent . . . programme of reforms' was the most effective remedy against social upheavals.' It was with this reform perspective that the 'Post War Economic Development Committee,' set up by the capitalists in 1942, which eventually drafted the Bombay Plan, was to function. Its attempt was to incorporate 'whatever is sound and feasible in the socialist movement' and see 'how far socialist demands could be accommodated without capitalism surrendering any of its essential features.' The Bombay Plan, therefore, seriously took up the question of rapid economic growth and equitable distribution, even arguing for the necessity of partial nationalization, the public sector, land reform and a series of workers' welfare schemes.

Thus we see that clearly the Indian capitalist class was anti-socialist and bourgeois but it was not pro-imperialist. The maturity of the Indian capitalist class in identifying its long term interests, correctly understanding the nature of the Congress and its relationship with the different Classes in Indian society, its refusal to abandon the side of Indian nationalism even when threatened by the Left or tempted by imperialism, its ability to project its own class interests as societal interests, are some of the reasons which explains why, on the whole, the Indian national movement remained, till independence under bourgeois ideological hegemony, despite strong contending trends within it.

Role of Women in National Movement

Women in Indian freedom struggle have significantly contributed almost at par with their male counterparts in fighting the British yoke. The initiative, bravery, guts and headship that the women have showed in the freedom movements for the country's independence from colonial rule have given them widespread name, fame and significance in the Indian society. During the uprising of 1857, women of the ruling class came together along with the men to fulfill their ambition for an independent India. Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar and the famous Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Matangini Hazra, Sarojini Naidu had become iconic figures in the Indian political arena.

Indian women actively participated in the revolutionary movements for social changes during the national struggle for Independence. Thus, the participation of women was not restricted to one type of activity such as the non-violent Satyagraha Movement. Women's early contribution to the Indian national movement started in the late 19th Century with their involvement in the Indian National Congress. In 1890, Swarna Kumari Ghoshal, a women novelist and Kadambari Ganguly, the first woman graduate of the British Empire, went to attend the Indian National Congress meeting as a delegate. Even Sarojini Naidu requires to be mentioned with equal importance better known as 'Nightingale of India'. In the year 1905, National Movement for the country's independence took a crucial turn with the division of Bengal.

Role of Women in Independence Movement

Women joined men to protest against the British rulers by boycotting foreign goods and resolving to buy only those goods produced in the territory of Bengal. Mrs. Nonibala Devi joined the new Jugantar Party which was dedicated to aggressive movement in the early 20th century. Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and took up the demand for self-rule and later for Purna Swaraj through non-violent methods. His call to join the Satyagraha Movement witnessed women getting involved in all his programmes. Rani Gaidiniliu integrated the movement in North-East with the Indian freedom movement under Gandhiji. Some of the women who played a very active role in the Swadeshi Movement were Sarojini Naidu, Urmila Devi, Durgabai Deshmukh, S. Ambujammal, Basanti Devi, and Krishnabai Ram.

Women of educated and liberal families, as well as those from the rural areas actively joined Mahatma Gandhi in his non Cooperation Movement. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kripalani, Sarla Devi Chaudhurani, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Susheela Nair, and Aruna Asaf Ali are some the women freedom fighters who participated in the non-violent movement. Kasturba Gandhi and Kamala Nehru also participated in the National Movement. Lado Rani Zutshi and her daughters led the movement in Lahore. Indian women who joined the national movement belonged to all walks of life, all castes, religions and communities.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit hailed from a well-known family. Her father Motilal Nehru was the president of Congress and brother Jawaharlal Nehru went on to become India's Prime Minister. She was highly inspired by the personality of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi and by Sarojini Naidu. She participated in the Non Co-operation Movement to fight against the British rulers. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit attended many public lectures and represented the country abroad. She was a great fighter and took part in many of the freedom movements. In the year 1936, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was elected in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. Her political profession made her the first Women Cabinet Minister of India in the year 1937.

Aruna Asaf Ali was another renowned freedom fighter and a devoted sociologist. She was selected as the first Mayor of Delhi. Sarojini Naidu was a noted poet, and one of the great freedom fighters of the country. Sarojini Naidu actively campaigned for the Khilafat Movement. Active Participation of Women in Politics The Indian National Army (INA), which was established by Subhas Chandra Bose, was one of the most genuine and fearless movements and Indian men and women under the able and remarkable leadership of this great patriot. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose recruited around 1000 women for the Rani of Jhansi Regiment from different South East Asian countries. Dr. Lakshmi Swaminathan, who was a medical practitioner by profession, led this regiment. The women in the regiment were given the same training like their male counterparts. Even their uniform was similar to the men soldiers. The real impact of

the INA may not have been in military terms, but it had a deep psychological impact on the women of India.

While there were significant numbers of women patriots who stood by Gandhiji and the Congress in the non-violent movement, women of Bengal and from other parts of India also participated in a vital role in various armed revolutions. Women played a major role in the Lahore Students Union of Bhagat Singh and the Kakori Train Robbery case. The Mahila Rashtriya Sangha was established by Latika Ghosh in the year 1928. Veena Das who shot at the Governor of Bengal, and Kamla Das Gupta and Kalyani Das, Kalpana datta, Pritilata Wadekar were all active within the respective revolutionary groups. Thus quite clearly women courageously participated in violent and non-violent movements of Indian independence.

The women in Indian freedom struggle have excelled as speakers, marchers, campaigners and tireless volunteers. They actively participated in the processions and rallies conducted by the Indian political parties. They always fought for Hindu-Muslim unity. The contribution of women in Indian freedom struggle is truly remarkable.

The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one.

Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi (19 November 1828 – 17 June 1858)

Rani Lakshmbai was one of the leading warriors of India's First freedom struggle who laid an outstanding influence on the succeeding women freedom fighters. She used to go into the battlefield dressed as a man. Holding the reins of her horse in her mouth she used the sword with both hands. She fought valiantly and although beaten she refused to surrender and fell as a warrior should, fighting the enemy to the last. Her remarkable courage inspired many men and women in India to rise against the alien rule. She was a symbol of bravery, patriotism, self-respect, perseverance, generosity and resistance to British rule. She fought till her last breath for the noble cause of India's independence.

Begum Hazrat Mahal (1820—1879)

Begum Hazrat Mahal was a great Indian freedom-fighter who played a major role during India's First War of independence (1857-58). She was also known as the Begum of Awadh (Oudh) and was the wife of the then Lucknow ruler, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. She led a band of her supporters against the British, and was even able to seize the control of Lucknow. She worked in close association with other leaders of the India's First War of Independence, including Nana Sahib. Begum was not only a strategist but also fought on the battlefield. When the forces under the command of the British re-captured Lucknow and most part of the Awadh, she was forced to retreat. When her forces lost ground, she fled Oudh and organized soldiers again in other places. She turned down all offers of amnesty and allowances by the British rulers.

1879. She could not find refuge in an asylum in Nepal, where she made an endless effort in fighting for the freedom of India and her stamp on her name.

Sarojini Naidu (February 13, 1879 – March 2, 1949),

Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, was a distinguished poet, renowned freedom fighter and one of the great orators of her time. She was elected as the president of Indian National Congress. The dynamic phase of Sarojini's career was from 1917-1919. She campaigned for the Khilafat Movement.

When Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement, she proved a faithful lieutenant. With great courage she quelled the rioters, sold proscribed literature, and addressed frenzied meetings on the carnage at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. In 1930 when Mahatma Gandhi chose her to lead the Salt Satyagraha the stories of her courage became legion. After Gandhi's arrest she had prepared 2,000 volunteers under the scorching sun to raid the Dahrsana Salt Works, while the police faced them half a mile up the road with rifle, lathis (canes) and steel tipped clubs. She gave up writing poetry and fully devoted herself to emancipation of women, education, Hindu-Muslim unity etc. She became a follower of Gandhiji and accompanied him to England. Whenever in England, she openly criticized British rule in India which caught the attention of scholars and intellectuals.

Madam Bhikha Ji Cama (24 September 1861-- 13 August 1936.)

Madam Cama fought for the freedom of the country till the last in her own way, and helped many revolutionaries with money and materials. She unfurled the first National Flag at the International Socialist Conference in Stuttgart (Germany) in 1907 and declared "This flag is of Indian Independence! Behold, it is born! It has been made sacred by the blood of young Indians who sacrificed their lives. I call upon you, gentlemen to rise and salute this flag of Indian Independence. In the name of this flag, I appeal to lovers of freedom all over the world to support this flag." A thousand representatives from several countries were attended. She traveled a lot of places including America and propagated about Indians struggle for Independence.

Annie Besant (October 1, 1847 – September 20, 1933)

Annie Besant an Irish lady the leader of the Theosophical Society joined the Indian National Congress and gave it a new direction. She was the first woman president of the Congress and gave a powerful lead to women's movement in India. She soon became a leading labour organizer, strike leader and reformer. She also became involved in Indian Nationalism and in 1916 established the Indian Home Rule League of which she became President. She started a newspaper, "New India", criticized British rule and was jailed for sedition. She came to be associated with rationalistic congress group of workers who did not appreciate Gandhi's views. She got involved in political and educational activities and set up a number of schools and colleges, the most important of which was Central Hindu College High School at Banaras which she started in 1913.

Arun Asaf Ali (July 16, 1909,—July 29, 1996)

Aruna became an active member of Congress Party and participated in public processions during the Salt Satyagraha. She was arrested on the charge that she was a vagrant and hence not released in 1931 under the Gandhi-Irwin Pact which stipulated release of all political

prisoners. Other women co-prisoners refused to leave the premises unless she was also released and gave in only after Mahatma Gandhi intervened.

In 1932, she was held prisoner at the Tihar Jail where she protested the indifferent treatment of political prisoners by launching a hunger strike. Her efforts resulted in an improvement of conditions in the Tihar Jail but she was moved to Ambala and was subjected to solitary confinement. She edited 'Inqulab' a monthly journal of the Indian National Congress. On August 8, 1942, the AICC passed the Quit India resolution at the Bombay session. The government responded by arresting the major leaders and all members of the Congress Working Committee and thus tried to pre-empt the movement from success. Aruna Asaf Ali presided over the remainder of the session on 9 August and hoisted the Congress flag and this marked the commencement of the movement. The police fired upon the assembly at the session. Aruna was dubbed the Heroine of the 1942 movement for her bravery in the face of danger and was called Grand Old Lady of the Independence movement in her later years.

Usha Mehta (March 25, 1920 – August 11, 2000)

Usha Mehta is remembered for broad casting the Congress Radio, and she called it the Secret Congress Radio, an underground radio station, which was functioned for few months during the Quit India Movement of 1942.

She is also known as child leader as in 1928, eight-year-old Usha participated in a protest march against the Simon Commission and shouted her first words of protest against the British Raj: "Simon Go Back." As a child, she did not comprehend the significance of her actions except that she was participating in a movement to free her country under the leadership of Gandhi. She and many other children participated in morning protests against the British Raj and picketing in front of liquor shops. During the Quit India Movement, Usha quickly became a leader. She moved from New Delhi to Mumbai, where she hoisted the tricolor on August 9, 1942 at Gawalia Tank Ground.

Kasturba Gandhi (April 11, 1869 – February 22, 1944),

Kasturba Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's wife worked with him for many years. She was a leader of Women's Satyagraha for which she was imprisoned. She helped her husband in the cause of Indigo workers in Champaran, Bihar and the No Tax Campaign in Kaira, Gujarat. She was arrested twice for picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops, and in 1939 for participating in the Rajkot Satyagraha. She many times took her husband's place when he was under arrest. Kasturba suffered from chronic bronchitis. Stress from the Quit India Movement's arrests and ashram life caused her to fall ill. After contracting pneumonia, she died from a severe heart attack on February 22, 1944 while she was in prison along with Mahatma Gandhi.

Kamala Nehru (1899–1936)

in his domestic work, Jawaharlal Nehru's wife gave full support to he actively for the freedom struggle. In the Nehru home town of Allahabad, she organized processions, addressed meetings and led picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops. She played a prominent part in organizing the No Tax Campaign in United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh).

In the Non Cooperation movement of 1921, she organized groups of women in Allahabad and propagated use of khadi cloths. When her husband was arrested, to prevent him delivering a "seditious" public speech, she went in his place to read it out. She was twice arrested by British authorities. Kamala died from tuberculosis in Switzerland while Jawaharlal Nehru's was in prison. She spent some time at Gandhi's ashram with Kasturba Gandhi as well.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit (August 18, 1900 - December 1, 1990)

She was the daughter of Motilal Nehru. She was greatly inspired by Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi and impressed by Sarojini Naidu. She entered the Non Co-operation Movement to fight against the British rule.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit represented India in many of the conferences abroad. She attended numerous public lectures and challenged the British dominated delegate's rights to represent India therein. She was a great fighter and took parts in many of the freedom movement. She was arrested in 1932 and sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. She was arrested in 1940 and yet again during the Quit India Movement in 1942.

Conclusion

Women shouldered critical responsibilities in India's struggle for freedom. They held public meetings, organized picketing of shops selling foreign alcohol and articles, sold Khadi and actively participated in National Movements. They bravely faced the baton of the police and went behind the iron bars and hundreds and thousands of Indian women dedicated their lives for obtaining freedom of their motherland.

The Lower Caste Movements in Modern India

In medieval times the Indian religious reformers mostly attracted their followers from the lower castes. In contrast to this the socio-religious reform movements of the 19th century were mostly pioneered by the Upper Caste Hindus who condemned the caste system and untouchability. Unfortunately both these challenges though conceived in the spirit of enlightened social regeneration achieved marginal success.

The Changing Scenario

A number of circumstances in the 19th centuries created class consciousness among the lower castes who took upon themselves to struggle for caste equality. Their efforts resulted in the organization of various lower caste movements in South India and Western India.

The British Policy of Divide and Rule, the growth of Western system of education, the introduction of a common Indian Penal code (1861) and Code of Criminal Procedure (1872), the extension of the railway network (where every Indian could buy ticket of any class and occupy any seat available), the growth of national consciousness and the popularity of the modern political thought based on equality and social egalitarianism created a social and political climate in which the caste system could not be defended. The leading lights among the Lower Castes themselves organized caste movements.

Reactions against Brahminical Domination

In South India, the lower caste movements were a direct revolt against the Brahminical domination in the Madras Presidency. It is interesting to note that in 1916 a spokesman of the lower castes pointed out that out of the 15 members of the All India Congress Committee from Madras Presidency only one was a non-Brahmin. Some of the lower caste leaders propagated that the Dravidians were the original inhabitants of India while the Aryans were the immigrants into India and they had brought the evil institution of the caste system with them. Manifestation of such feeling came as Dravidian movement.

Dravidian Movement

With the spread of Christianity and the western education, the non-Brahmin in the Madras presidency region developed a new awareness as a result of which resentment started growing among them against the domination by Brahmin and other higher castes in profession as well as in politics, especially the Congress Party. They believed that, if they had to make successful careers, the domination of Brahmins in professional and political life had to be first overthrown.

By 1914 this conflict between the emerging non-Brahmin urban middle class and the establishment of mostly Brahmin middle class and upper class took a sharp turn. **The non-Brahmin caste uniting themselves and the Non-Brahmin Manifesto published in 1916 was followed by the formation of South Indian Liberal Federation in 1917 by S.P. Theagaraya and Dr. T.M.Nair.** After the Montague Chelmsford Reforms 'South-Indian liberal federation' was converted into **Justice Party** to counter the political influence of the Congress.

However the Justice Party was a party of urban educated professional middle class elite in nature and therefore failed to build a mass base. **Soon after, the self-respect movement was founded in 1925 by E.V. Ramaswami Naicker.**

The self-respect movement was based on the Dravidian ideology to save the non-Brahmin from the tyranny of Brahmin who were considered Aryans. The self-respect movement aimed at removing the control of Brahmin from the social and political level and sought to wean the people away from the puranic ritualistic Hinduism necessitating the presence of Brahmin priest. He denounced Hinduism as an instrument of brahminical control and the laws of Manu as inhuman, the puranas as fairy tale. He ridiculed hindu god and goddesses and concluded **"There are certain things which cannot be mended but only ended. Brahminical Hindism is one such."** Naicker condemned religion as superstition and opposed imposition of Hindi on the Dravidians. **His followers called him Thanthai (father) and Periyar (great soul).**

It considered the Brahmin as the symbol of all exploitation. This movement was successful in appealing to the masses and acquired a mass following finally; In 1937 Naicker was elected the President of the Justice party and finally the self-respect movement and Justice Party were merged in 1944 to form Dravida Kazhagam headed by Naicker. It adopted a militant mass agitation strategy and advocated an egalitarian ideology condemning the caste system.

Later on in 1949, due to difference between the Naicker and C. N. Annadurai (follower and friend of Naicker) who led the younger section in the Dravida Kazhagam, there was a split leading to the formation of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam under Anna's leadership. The majority of the rank and file of D.K. joined the DMK. Initially the support base of DMK consisted

of the lower middle class, students, lower castes like Nadars, Marwars and Adi Dravidians and unemployed youth, etc. Cinema was one of the effective media which was used by DMK to propagate its ideology and win a mass base.

A consequence of the DMK was the decline in the domination of Brahmins in Tamil Nadu, a new sense of release and freedom among the lower castes. However, later on as DMK tried to capture power, it gradually abandoned its reformist zeal and even the demand for creation of a separate Dravidian Nadu and acquired a character of one of the mainstream political parties with a rational support base.

SNDP (Sri Narayan Dharma Pratipalan Movement)

This movement was launched among the **Izhavas of Kerala** by their leader **Narayan Guru**. Traditionally, Izhavas were an untouchable castes of Toddy Trappers e.g. they had to stay away thirty four feet from the Namboodhari Brahmins. They suffered from many other disabilities both social and ritual. They were denied access to Hindu temples or to the bathing tank of Hindus. Their women were not allowed to cover their breast or to wear any footwear, nor could they build pucca house.

In the later part of the 19th century with the spread of modern humanistic and secular ideas and also the spread of egalitarian -ideas through Christianity, Izhavas came to view their situation as one of the deprivation and exploitation. Under the charismatic leadership of Sri Narayan Guru they rejected Brahminical domination and developed a new interpretation of Hinduism.

The new ideology was based on the principle of self-respect, honour and worth of individual. It was an ideology of protest against the Brahminical values system of hierarchy and pollution. Narayan Guru established a parallel source of legitimacy by establishing new institutions like temple priest, monk and monasteries. He openly criticised Gandhiji for his faith in Chaturvarna, which, he maintained, is the parent of the caste-system and untouchability. He pointed out that the difference in castes is only superficial and emphasized that the juice of all leaves of a particular tree would be the same in content. **He gave a new Slogan "One religion, one caste and one god for mankind".**

Later T.V. Madhavan led the Vaikum Temple Road Entry Movement in 1927, under the patronage of Mahatma Gandhi. After the two years of sustained Satyagraha the Izhavas were granted the right to use the road which ran near the Vaikum Temple which was owned by upper caste only. This was a historic victory against orthodox ideas-of pollution. Thus, the leaders of the movement were able to achieve for their followers all the basic rights in the field of religion, education, employment and politics.

The SNDP movement represented one of the most successful attempts of the untouchable castes to alter the traditional balance of power besides improving their own positions. It also demonstrated that it was possible to remain within the fold of Hinduism and yet escape from the stigma of untouchability. The new awareness arose among them motivated them to take to modern education, which in the long run enabled them to access of the modern occupation and professions which carried high rewards in terms of prestige and wealth. Thus Izhavas as a community successfully raised their status in society.

Jyotirao Phule and the Satya Sodhak Samaj

In western India Jyotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890) struggled for the lower caste. Jyotiba was born at Poona in Mali caste (who supplies flowers and garlands). Some incidents of Brahminical arrogance changed the outlook of Jyotiba. Once Jyotiba was scolded and insulted by a Brahman for his audacity in joining a Brahman marriage procession. The Brahmins also opposed Jyotiba in running a school for the lower castes and women. The Brahminical pressure compelled Jyotiba to close the school; under upper caste pressure Govindrao turned Jyotiba and his wife from leaving his family house.

Jyotiba believed that the Brahman under the pretext of religion tyrannized over other castes and turned them into their slaves. Jyotiba was ever critical of the Indian National Congress Leaders for their neglect of the interest on the weaker sections. He maintained that the Congress could not be called truly national unless it showed general interest in the welfare of the lower and backward castes.

In 1873, Jyotiba started the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Truth Seeking Society) with the aim of securing social justice for the weaker section of society. He opened a number of schools and orphanages for the children and women belonging to all castes. He was elected as a member of the Poona Municipal Committee in 1876. He published 'Dharma Tritiya Ratna' (exposure of puranas), Ishara (A warning), and Life of Shivaji etc. In 1888 he was honoured with the title of Mahatma. Soon the mantle of fighting for the cause of depressed class was taken up by B.R. Ambedkar in twentieth century as a part of Indian national Movement.

Mahar Movement

Mahars are numerically significant caste of Maharashtra who was traditionally considered as untouchable. Normally, they were allocated menial task like sweeping, digging groves, removing caracasses of dead animals, cutting woods and playing music on ceremonial occasion in the village. They were denied access to civil amenities like wells, school and even service of Brahmins and Barbers etc. In the early 20th century, the Mahars started organizing themselves in fight against discrimination and to prove their status. They held conference in 1902 and insisted on recruitment to military and police service.

They were helped by the leaders of Non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra, especially by the depressed class Mission (1906) established by U.R. Shinde. The mission started separate schools and hostels for Mahars. Also, the efforts made by Mahatma Gandhi for the abolition of untouchability and overall impact of freedom struggle created new social awakening among them.

Later on, leadership for upliftment of Mahars was started by B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar provided a new movement and a radical turn of Mahar Movement. He rejected the Gandhian approach relying on change of the heart of caste Hindu and of incorporating the Harijan in the Sudra Varna; instead he adopted a new strategy of aggressive protest and resorted to political action.

He demanded separate electorate for the Harijans and during the late 20s, and early 30s several Satyagrahs were held for gaining entry into Hindu temple and Manusmriti was burnt to show their indignation against orthodox Hindus.

Ambedkar was disillusioned about the possibility of the Mahars or Harijan in general, being able to improve their condition within the fold of Hinduism. Thus, he decided to abandon Hinduism altogether and along with five lakhs Mahars embraced Buddhism.

The ideology of Mahars Movement was different from that of SNDP movement. While the former relied on total rejection of Hinduisim, the latter at interpretation of Hinduisim. The reason for adopting Buddhism was its egalitarian ideology. Thus Mahars could escape the stigma of untouchable and other forms of discrimination.

Moreover, the collective mobilization of Mahars in the course of social movement created a new awareness among the Mahars regarding their educational, economic and political rights. They took to modern education in large numbers which enabled them to secure the new occupation in the urban areas. Thus the overall social status of the Mahars was raised.

Ambedkar's Dynamic Role

B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) was crusader in the cause of the upliftment of the lower castes. He was a Mahar (untouchable caste) lawyer educated at the Columbia University. Bhimrao married Rambai of his own caste in 1905; she died in 1935. In 1948, Bhimrao married a second time Dr. Sharada Kabir who came from a Saraswati Brahmin Family of Bombay.

In July 1924, Ambedkar started an organization in Bombay called 'Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha' for the moral and material progress of the untouchables. He resorted to methods of agitation and launched Satyagraha to establish civic rights of the untouchables to enter the Hindu temples and draw water from public wells.

In 1930 Ambedkar entered national politics. He demanded separate electorates for the untouchables. He was nominated as a delegate of the three round tables Conference in London (1930-32). The Communal Award announced by the British Prime Minister on 17 August 1932 provided for separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. This upset Gandhiji who went on fast unto death; a final compromise popularly known as the Poona Pact (24 Sept., 1932) provided for reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes in the general constituencies.

In April 1942, he founded the Schedule Caste Federation as an all India party. Later, he announced that schedule caste would leave Hindu fold altogether. He along with many followers embraced Buddhism.

On the eve of independence, Ambedkar was nominated by the Congress Party as a member of the Constituent Assembly. His contribution in framing and piloting the India Constitution and the Hindu Code Bill are well recognized. Today, Ambedkar is remembered as the emancipator of the lower castes.

The new Constitution of Indian Republic has accepted the Principle of Equality for all Indian citizens and has abolished untouchability. The Untouchability Act 1955 replaced the punishment to be awarded for offences under this Act.

Middle Class Movements

Development of middle class

The middle class is placed between labour and capital. It neither directly owns the means of production that pumps out the surplus generated by wage labour power nor does it by its own labour produce the surplus which has use and exchange value.

The middle class comprises mainly of petty bourgeoisie and the white collar workers. In terms of occupation, shopkeepers, salesmen, brokers, government and non-government office workers, supervisors and professionals such as engineers, doctors etc constitute the middle class. Most of these occupations require at least some degree of formal education. The middle class is primarily a product of capitalist development and the expansion of the functions of the state in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Though the petty bourgeoisie and managers did exist in pre-capitalist society they constituted a tiny class. Industrial development and expansion of markets require not only a larger managerial class than earlier but also forced the state to shoulder the responsibilities of monitoring market competition and resolving the contradictions of capitalist development. This includes formation and implementation of welfare programmes to minimize tension in society. For carrying out these functions the state also required a managerial class. Formal education contributed to the expansion of this class.

Form of middle class movements

Middle class movements are primarily analyzed in terms of the issues that they raise such as social reform movements, the nationalist movement, and human right movements and so on. These movements are called mass movements as the issues are not class specific not affecting mainly the middle class. The issues are posed as societal problems. The leaders of such movements who belong to the middle class mobilize other classes for support.

Colonial rule established and introduced a capitalist economy, a new administrative system and English education in the early 19th century. Consequently a tiny educated class emerged in urban areas. The members of this class were upper caste Hindus and Muslims. They not only raised questions but also revolted against certain customs and traditions of the Hindu social system. These individuals known as social reformers were all those who were advocates of alterations in social customs which would involve a break with traditionally accepted patterns; they were those who convinced themselves that altered ways of thinking and behaving were positive values, sought to convince others to modify or entirely transform their ways of life.

These reformers either revolted individually or formed associations. These associations were of three types –general associations; caste reform associations and religious reform bodies. The Indian National Social Conference was formed in 1887.

existence at provincial and local level. Some of them were formed around one issue such as widow remarriage, child marriage whereas others took up general issues related to social reform protesting against conservatism including protests against religious heads, superstitions, caste restrictions etc. Some reformers confined their activities to their castes. They formed

caste associations and persuaded caste fellows to join for reformation of certain unacceptable practices.

The main thrust of the socio-religious reform movements was to revive or rejuvenate Hindu religion and society. This was basically to counter the impact of western culture and the efforts of Christian missionaries. The traditional social structure and religion were not able to cope with the new economic structure which was based on individualism. The reformers were striving to extend the principle of individual liberty to the sphere of religion.

There were keen internal rivalries but these were between caste and caste community not between class and class. Moreover those groups which felt a similarity of interest were themselves more the product of bureaucratic initiative than of economic change. Since these groups can be largely identified with the men educated in western styles and since it was these men whose hopes and fears went into the building of the new associations that emerged as the Indian National Congress a conceptual system based on elites, rather than on classes would seem more promising.

These elites belonged to middle class. Granting that the initiative came from the bureaucracy, it was intended to bring about economic change in society in general and middle class in particular.

Participation in Freedom struggle

The middle class participated at various stages of India's freedom movement. The major events of their collective action were the partition of Bengal in 1906, the non-cooperation campaign in the early 1920s, the anti-Simon agitation in the mid-1920s, Civil Disobedience movements in the early 1930s and Quit India movement in 1942. Besides this there were a number of local-level campaigns organized and spontaneous against the British Raj.

Social reform among the Muslims began with the Aligarh movement led by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. The main thrust of the movement was to persuade the Muslim landed gentry to take an English education, it was feared that the Muslims would be unable to compete with the Hindus and would remain backward. The Khilafat movement (1919-1924) led by the Muslim intelligentsia and the Ulema mobilized a cross section of the Muslims. Their claim was that the Sultan of Turkey was the custodian and defender, the protector of the holy places. The movement was supported by the Muslim groups and the Indian National Congress.

At the end of the 19th century the educated Hindu Middle Class of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh launched a series of agitations for the removal of Urdu and for its replacement by Hindi in the Devnagri script. Muslim intellectuals also launched a counter agitation in defense of Urdu.

Post-independence, the upper caste Hindu middle class launched struggles in Bihar and Gujarat against reservation for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes. Upper caste government servants also launched agitation against the roster system which provided certain benefits to SC/ST employees. These agitations were primarily result of the conflict of economic interests between upper and deprived caste groups; middle class leaders of these agitations raised the issue of merit, secularism and efficiency.

Some sections of the middle class –white collar government employees, school and university teachers etc. launched movements on economic issues affecting them such as revision of pay scales, bonus, and job security. But in the course of the development of these movements these issues were side tracked and movements raised populist issues which appeal to various classes. They raised moral and cultural issues. For example the Bihar movement known as movement for social revolution in 1974 began with economic issues; it also raised issues of corruption, democratic rights and social reform.

The middle class of South India launched struggles during the 1950s and 1960s against the imposition of Hindi and for retention of English. For them it was a struggle against Hindu Imperialism. The middle class of linguistic groups such as Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu and Punjabi demanded formation of linguistic states in the 1950s. They launched agitations for these demands. For maintaining their cultural identity the middle class among the Tamils, the Punjabi, the Naga and the Mizos spearheaded agitation for the formation of separate states within or outside the Indian Union.

Regional or linguistic identities have been sharpened in India since independence and they have become a potential force consisting of the middle class which face competition from other classes of the society.

A small section of urban middle class intelligentsia has formed organizations at state and national levels for the protection of civil and democratic rights. They raise issues related to violation of civil and democratic rights of various strata of society including the oppressed classes. Thus, Indian middle class contributed in almost every movement in India and middle class intelligentsia played a great role in freedom struggle of India as well.