

Farmers Movements in Karnataka

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Abstract

India has a long history of peasant or farmers' movement, dating back to the colonial period when farmers in different parts of India revolted against Zamindars, landlords, British colonial masters or powers including feudal lords. These movements were the results of severe exploitation, oppression, loss of rights over land, imposition of new taxes, and new agrarian relations of the peasants with the Colonial state or the feudal lords.

Most of the struggles that the peasants resorted to were either carried as part of nationalist struggle or independent of it. Some of the important struggles of farmers or peasants during the British period were : Bhil Revolt (1822,1823,1837-60), Deccan Peasant Revolt (1875), Mopilla Revolt (1921), The Muslhi Satyagraha (1921-24), Struggle of Warlis (1945), Birsa Munda revolt Nagar Peasant Uprising(1830-33). In this context, three important struggles that Gandhi led require our special attention. They were: Champaran (1918-19); Bardoli (1925) and Kheda(1918). In the first struggle, the primary issue was opposing the Tinkathia System imposed on the Indigo cultivators of Champaran by the colonial powers. In the second and third struggle, opposing the rent payable to the government at the time of distress was the major issue. All these struggles had one impact: it brought the peasants to the nationalist movement.

In Karnataka the period of late 1930's together with the Post-war period 1947-50 saw the most intense politically sponsored activity among middle and poor peasants has occurred in south India. These agitations known as tenant's agitation, such as Kagodu18 Satyagraha in Karnataka during19 1950-51, Uttara-Kannada during 1950-70 etc., were carried over the issues such as forcible ejection, debts and rents it took the forms of forcible occupation of lands and sometimes culminated in violent agitations

Key words: peasant, farmers', movement, Zamindars Karnataka, agitation, Kagodu.

Introduction

It was obvious that with the termination of colonial rule, the character and nature of the peasant or farmers' movement underwent sea change. The Post-independent India saw broadly two kinds of peasant or farmers' struggles in the recent past.

- Peasant movements led by Marxist and Socialists- such as Telangana Movement (1946-51), Tebagma movement (1946-1949), Kagodu Satyagraha (1951), Naxalbari Movement (1967) and Lalgah movement (2009).
- Farmers' movement led by rich farmers in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat.

One of the problems that the scholars faced while detailing farmers' movement is the conceptualisation. How to distinguish "peasants from farmers"? Is peasant a suitable analytical category in the post-independence period? In fact, the concept of

“peasant” is now increasingly being replaced by “farmers” for the simple reason that the development paradigm initiated during the post-independence period has created a new category called ‘Market Oriented’ farmers. The peasant is simply defined as a social category, who lives in subsistence level and desist from market competition. On the contrary, the farmer involves in market competition and tries to be autonomous while dealing with production, distribution and cropping pattern issues. Infact the introduction of green revolution, new technology, government subsidies etc has created such a category in recent past. These categories are also called “rich farmers”. The struggle that these farmers resorted to in recent years has been conceptualised as ‘New Farmers’ Movement’. The latter movement comes closer to Gandhian movement of yesteryears. This is because of the fact that the strategies that they resorted to, methodologies that they adopted, the politics that they played, the analysis that they made including the conceptualising of some of their struggles, had the bearing of Gandhian Movement. Even some of organisations in New Farmers’ Movement such as the one in Karnataka vouched for Gandhism openly. Others such as Shektari Sanghathana of Maharashtra did not accept or adhere to Gandhism in total

The beginning of the New Farmers’ Movement in general is seen from the decade of 1980s. However, its genesis requires to be stretched back to the earlier decade of 1970s. This was the decade when farmers of green revolution area began to rally around political parties and leaders. One such leader who organised the farmers under political party was Chaudhury Charan Singh, the former Prime Minister of India. He organised few rallies raising such issues as parity in prices between industrial and agricultural commodities; allowing import of agricultural input from abroad, reducing the protection given to industry, due representation of farmers in different boards and committees, subsidies to electricity, water fertilizer, seeds, reducing the income disparity between the urban and rural people, establishing Kisan Banks as well as agricultural polytechnics etc.

Objective:

This paper seeks to study the role of farmer movements in Karnataka agriculture.

The Crisis faced by Indian Agriculture:

The 1980s saw the beginning of what is called New Farmers’ Movement in different parts of India. The reasons were: terms of trade going against the agriculture, declining purchasing power, un-remunerative prices, agriculture becoming losing proposition, increase in input prices, declining per capita income from agriculture etc.

It all began in Maharashtra when Shetkari Sanghathana under Sharad Joshi, a former employee of UN turned farmer, began agitating in village called Chakan in Pune for remunerative prices for agricultural commodities, particularly for onion. This one point agenda of remunerative prices began to be enacted by farmers in other states of India. In Karnataka, it was started by farmers of Navalgund and Navilgund demanding abolition of betterment levy in Command Area. This helped in the formation of an organisation called Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha. Prof. Nanjundaswamy, a Professor of Law, became its ideologue and undisputed leader.

In Uttar Pradesh, the movement started much late in 1986. It was spearheaded by Mahendra Singh Tikat a peasant by profession. His organisation is called Bharatiya Kisan Union. His movement started from a small village called Sisoli and Shamli in Meerut District in Uttar Pradesh. Except for the Maharashtra movement, in other movements, more than remunerative prices the other issues received focus. The list of demands would cover each and every issue of farmers. Many

a time the demands of the farmers' movement would include such issues as remunerative prices, writing off loans, anti-government policy of procurement, levy policy, liberalisation etc. Other than these economic issues, the farmers' movement also focused on social issues.

In this respect the experiment done by the Karnataka Farmers' Movement under Raitha Sangha and Maharashtra movement under Shetkari Sanghathana are noteworthy. Both tried to address the issues of gender or women by organising massive rallies. The Maharashtra movement attempted to give women the property rights under the programme called "Lakshmi Mukhti". the Karnataka movement, on the contrary, organised a massive rally in Haliyal in 1983 for the purpose of shifting property relations at the rural side. Further, the Karnataka movement organised thousands of simple, inter-caste marriages etc. In fact women's issues were interwoven in its various struggles too. For example, in its anti-social forestry, prohibition struggle, women's issues were prominent. All these bring one question to the fore: is it possible to confine the farmers' movement to locality or are they part of global struggles too?

Major Struggles of New Farmers' Movement

The Uttar Pradesh movement under Mahendra Singh Tikait organised many rallies, agitations as well as struggles. Some of the major well known struggles are as follows:

§ Struggle against Power Tariff , 1986

§ Meerut Struggle, 1988

§ Agitation for Payment of Arrears, 2007

§ Sit-in Dharna at Jantar Mantar, 2008

On the contrary, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha also organised series of agitations over the years. Some of the major struggles were:

§ Road Block agitation of 1981 and 1991

§ Rail and Rasta Roko of 1982, 1992 (remunerative prices)

§ Jail Bharo Agitation of 1982

§ Long March of 1982,1983,1984

§ Agitation for Prohibition

§ Squatting inside Vidhan Soudha ,1983

§ Agitation against Social Forestry

§ Agitation against Procumbent Policy, 1985

§ Rally of 1989

Similarly Shetkari Sanghathana of Maharashtra also carried couple of struggles. However, many of them centred on the single agenda of demanding remunerative prices. Some of the important struggles are as follows:

§ Nasik Agitation of 1980

§ Nippani Agitation of 1981

§ Rail and Rasta Roko agitation of 1981,1986

§ Pandharpur Rally of 1983

§ Agitation against Rajiv Vastra, 1985-87

Shimoga Kabbu belegarara Sangha:

Shimoga District got their lands irrigated through Bhadra reservoir project which came up bordering Shimoga and Chikmagalur districts. The newly irrigated land also was exposed to sugar cane cultivation. A sugar mill Tungabhadra Sugars of Mayura Industries came up in the command. The exploitation of sugarcane farmers by the sugar mills led to the formation of shimoga kabbu belegarara Sangha. The Sangha was fighting for remunerative prices, payment of over dues and higher price for sugar cane³⁶. This SZKBS is the foreumer for later Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha. The activites of Shimoga Zilla kabbu belegarara sangha under which they carried their struggle appeared more to be a trade-union movement³⁷. At the other end the farmers of Tungabhadra command, Bellary District agitating for better deal for farmers' appeared almost as Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha demands. The demands of Bellary farmers included writing-off of agricultural loans, declaring agriculture as an industry, establishment of small and cottage industries, floor price for agricultural produce. Reduced interest, scrapping of agricultural income tax, exemption of taxes on agricultural machinery, dissolution of land tribunals, increase in the ceiling of irrigated land, low input price, restoring the lands, remunerative prices for sugarcane, cancelling of collection of market cess, construction of irrigation tanks, scrapping of levy of paddy etc.³⁸, Many of the demands of the Bellary Farmers sowed the seeds for the later Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha in the 1980's.

Dakshina Bharatha Sanna belegara Okkuta:

Small Growers Association of South India was established in 1978⁴⁰. this assoication is unique in itself from the Association of Sugar cane Growers, on the matter of taking up issues of commercial crops such as coffee, cardamom and paddy. The activities of this Sangha were confined to Shimoga, Hassan and Chkmagalur districts. Its main activities were confined to opposition to the levy system, attachment of farmers property, placing restrictions on the movement of food grains. One of the important action programmed for the movement, is to break the check post at the border of Mudigere taluk and beginning of Dakshina Kannada Distinct, Karkala taluk under the leardship of Prof. M.D. nanjundaswamy and Sri N.D. Sundaresh. The demands of the Okkuta included uniform market prices, supply of inputs through Co-operatives, increase in the quality of loans, remunerative prices, establishment of Sugar factories nationalization of coffee processing and business. Most of the leaders of this movement were from socialist background of Lohia and Santaveri Gopalagowda, so they lead this agitation successfully. Since these leaders had a long tactical experience in organizing the farmers hardly any challenge developed against their capacity for leading the movement. The beginning of the 1980's in Karnataka presented a favourable atmosphere for a sustained farmers' movement to take its birth. Particularly in the newly irrigated commands of Malaprabha and Gathaprabha areas in the middle part of Karnataka covering the districts of Darwad, Belagavi and Bijapur. This area represented an accumulation of contradiction between Agriculture and Industry on the one hand and

the peasant and the state on the other⁴³. This contradiction in the conditions of 1980 resulted in the Farmers' of this command area coming together to lead an agitation of farmers, to last a long time in terms of mobilization and influence not only in Karnataka but also at the All India level.

Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangaha (KRRS): a new discourse: The new discourse of the Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangh (KRRS) is expressed explicitly when they argue that the farmers' are the honest people living in villages and working hard to derive their livelihood, but still they live in object poverty. For this farmers have not been able to find the reasons, knew they have been responsible for their poverty⁴⁴. The causes for their poverty and indebtedness are not farmers themselves, but due to the policies towards agriculture like levy policy, price policy, credit policy, revenue policies which have been responsible for their poverty.

The issues the organizers of the movement to disseminate with the Farmers':

The Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha (KRRS) is a well organized cadre based organization, the organization train workers on issues which are very essential for the farmers to know-about.

1. Farmers' indebtedness is a lie. The cheating price policy of the state, unjustifiable taxes, unethical interest on his loan have made him indebted to the state.
2. The goods farmers' purchases have been enormously priced by the collusion of the state with industrialists have facilitated looting of the farmers' by the industrialists.
3. Our industries have no capacity to compete with foreign producers. Therefore they need raw materials at cheap price, labours at low wages and prices of food articles should not raise. Urban people to purchase their goods, they should not spend more on food. So to keep the urban people happy the farmers' have to live in poverty.
4. Because of these reasons minimum price is fixed for the food crops and imposition of levy on farmers. In this levy account only the farmers have given free food of Rs. 60 crores. Total loss in looting price the farmers have lost Rs. 3000 to Rs. 4000 crores.
5. The farmers who are already in difficulties, is imposed with high interest rates and high revenue charging have pauperized the Farmers of the State. The government's bad revenue policy, credit policy and pricing policies are responsible for the poverty of Farmers'.

Reliefs from these problems:

The Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha which has identified problems has also tried to give reliefs to the farmers. The relief measures are.

1. The misery inflicted on farmers should be removed by the state itself. The debts imposed on the farmers have to be repaid by the State. Revenue dues should also be cleared by the state. The loan and revenue over dues are not more than Rs. 100 crore.

2. The system of looting should be dismantled, the villages have to start a new life. For this all debt of Farmers' has to be written-off. All over-dues of taxes should be written-off. In future the farmers should be ensured with scientific price so that he can never be in debt, all taxes should be removed.

3. In addition to this, the Industries which are making huge profits, their price should be based on scientific consideration. The price of Farmers produce and industrial produce should have equal profitability. The luxury life in urban areas by looting farmers should be stopped. The incomes of the urban people should be limited. Land in rural areas, urban commercial property should also have a ceiling.

Conclusion

The problem of small farmers and Agricultural labourers is a serious issue in the rural India. To remove these problems the government should declare Agriculture as an industry argues the Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha (KRRS). Then all laws of Industrial labour should be extended to the agricultural labourers. In addition to scientific prices for its produce it is also important scientific wage for the labourers should be implemented⁶³. It is also important that the wasteland should be distributed to the landless and the state should assist them for cultivation; this reduces pressure on the existing agricultural land. Also starting Cottage Industries, Small Industries in order to generate employment should be taken up- argues the movement⁶⁴. With these housing for the agricultural labourers who have been neglected for a long time, have to provided. So that they can start a new social living, free schooling for their children, health facilities and pension for their old age⁶⁵-argues Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha (KRRS).

To increase the participation of the children of the agriculturist in various walks of life like, education and employment, 50 percent of the reservation be given to them⁶⁸ argues Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha. The Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha also indicates to achieve success in writing –off of all loans, Revenue and to get scientific price for agricultural produce, to realize healthy villages and to change the planning priorities it needs a persistent agitation⁷⁰. The states which are treating rural India in a step motherly attitude, to take control of them, controlling beauracracy which keeps troubling always, the looter of agriculture, the corrupt officials, industry and trade and commerce, we have to identify ways to control them through our agitation to establish equality with other sectors of the Indian economy.

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