



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine the major differences between peasant movements of the 19th and 20th century and their impact on society. (250 words)

25 Apr, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Give the introduction of conditions causing Peasant Movements.
- Describe the characteristics of 19th century Peasant Movements.
- Show the contrast in nature of 20th century Peasant Movements.
- Give a conclusion.

Introduction

- Throughout the 19th century, the British Empire was consolidating its rule in India through exploitative economic and land revenue policies.
- Peasants were among the worst sufferers of British rule. However, peasants resisted the exploitation and started to organize collective protests and movements against the policies.

Body

Characteristics of 19th century Peasant Movements

- **Immediate objective:** It was not the objective of these movements to end the system of subordination or exploitation of the peasants. The demands were centered almost wholly on economic issues.
- **Absence of understanding of colonialism at this stage:** The struggles were directed towards specific and limited objectives and redressal of particular grievances. The movements were directed against the foreign planters and indigenous zamindars and moneylenders. Colonialism was not the target of these movements.
- **Leadership:** The leadership in these revolts e.g. Indigo Revolt (1859-60), Pabna Agrarian league in the 1860s and 1870s and Deccan Riots were from the peasantry itself.
- **Territorial reach** was limited to a particular local region.
- **Organization:** There was no formal organization. These caused movements to be a short term phenomenon. Lack of organization inhibited the formation and implementation of long term strategy for movements.
- **Ideology:** Forward-looking ideology is a significant part of social movements however at this stage of Peasant movement there was the absence of any coherent alternative ideas about the future and these movements were spontaneous reaction of the exploited peasantry.

Characteristics of 20th century Peasant Movements

- **Peasant movement as part of Indian National Movement:** With the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian political scene, peasants were brought into the broader struggle against colonialism beginning with Champaran, Kheda and later Bardoli movement. There was an emergence of anti-colonialism consciousness among peasant.

- **The emergence of Class Conscious Organisations:** The Congress policy of safeguarding the interests of zamindars and landlords led to the emergence of independent class organisations of kisans in rural India. Radical sections in the peasant movements increasingly realised that the Congress was solicitous of the interest of the capitalists and land magnates. The first Kisan Congress held at Lucknow in 1935 led to the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha.
- **Influence of Communal politics:** Mappila revolt by Muslim tenants began as an anti-government and anti- landlord affair however it acquired communal overtones. The communalisation of the rebellion completed the isolation of the Mappilas from the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement.
- **All India Movements:** The period 1937-39 was the high watermark of the peasant movements and activity under the Congress provincial rule. The chief form of mobilisation was through holding kisan conferences and meetings where demands were aired and resolutions were passed. Mobilisation campaigns were carried out in the villages.
- **Leadership:** During this period peasant movements were led by Congress and communist leaders e.g. Telangana Movement was organized by communist-led guerillas. Similarly, Tehbhaga movement was led by Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha.

Conclusion

- The nature of Peasant movements evolve during the rule of British there were striking differences in the peasant movement in the earlier phase of British Rule and in the 20th century.
- The differences were natural progression coming out of increasing awareness of colonial motives, the emergence of Congress as a mass-based political organization and Marxist-communist ideas.

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