UNIT 31 POPULAR PROTESTS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Structure
31.0 Introduction
31.1 Historiographical Trends
31.2 Dominant Features of Pre-Colonial Society
31.3 Colonial Rule and Ruptures in Society
31.4 Characteristics of Popular Protests
31.5 Kol Revolt
31.6 Santal Revolt
31.7 Munda Uprisings
31.9 Moplah Uprisings
31.9 Punjab Disturbances of 1907
31.10 Kisan Sabhas and Baba Ramchandra
31.11 Telengana
31.12 Summary
31.13 Glossary
31.14 Exercises

31.0 INTRODUCTION

The official documentation deploys terms like Fituri, Hool, Ding, Ulgulan and Vidroha to describe varied uprisings which were dubbed mainly as law and order problems. However recent researches have shown that these terms denoted popular uprisings against colonial exploitation. These were led by peasants and tribals who were not monolithic entities. The differentiation within peasants and tribals indicated that they were parts of existing social structures and during time of protest, they were as much helped by other poor classes.

31.1 HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRENDS

Numerous works exist on the agrarian and social history of precolonial and colonial India. While the imperialist historiography has denied exploitation of India and has taken credit for bringing intellectual awakening in India, the nationalist historiography for a long time has only focused on Indian national movement. The role of congress leadership in mobilising peasants has been highlighted. However this has come under scrutiny.

Within Marxian framework, agrarian society and economy has been analysed within the context of mode of production. In the process social differentiation within peasantry has been also pointed out. However Shahid Amin in his study of ‘Peasant Production’ in colonial Uttar Pradesh has stressed the need to study process of production. In his assessment, only then the problems of peasants and nature of their subjectivity can be highlighted.

Initially works like those of S.B.Choudhary also focussed on the role of peasantry in studying popular movements. However this lacuna has been removed. Social Anthropologists and Historians have focused on various tribal movements to indicate the nature of social structures that determined popular protests led by tribals. In this regard K.Suresh Singh has produced seminal works on the protest movement led by Birsa Munda.
Ranajit Guha who has studied the popular aspects of peasant insurgency between 1783 and 1900 has provided an analytical framework. He has shown that official documentation was indicative of ‘power-discourse’. The points out since most of rebels were illiterates they found their existence in official documentation within colonial perspective so only by deconstructing these documents voices of peasants can be found.

He has argued that, as the rebel was conscious of starting revolt against dominant groups so he was an insurgent. However he found his identity at the level of dominant groups. That’s why he possessed negative consciousness. Ranajit Guha’s work definitely helps in understanding social ties, intellectual and spiritual beliefs that went into the making of peasant revolts. Though historians have questioned his concept of negation and the categories of dominant and subaltern groups but it remains a fact that he has produced wealth of information on the nature of popular protests.

The role of national movement, Mahatma Gandhi and Communist leadership in mobilizing people and coordinating anti imperialist movements has been highlighted in several works. Gyanendra Pandey and Kapil Kumar have analysed Kisan-Sabha movements in Northern India during 1920s. The autonomy of Kisan leaders like Baba Ramchandra and role of restrictive leaderships of congress in controlling peasant movements has been highlighted. Similarly the role of communist party in 1940s in leading popular protests against colonial and feudal exploitation has been highlighted. Mridula Mukherjee in her study on the Punjab has shown the variegated social structures in rural areas, which provided the milieu for variegated protest movements against colonial regime.

In recent years, there has been stress on the environmental history. Ramchandra Guha and Gadgil have argued that Marxian framework of mode of production does not take into account the exploitation of natural resources. They have focussed on ‘modes of resource use’ to point out how human beings either used natural resources rationally or exploited them on an unlimited scale. Both have argued there emerged ‘ecosystem people’, ‘omnivores’ and ‘carnivores’. In ‘This Fissured land’, both have focused on colonial forestry to point out its role in dislocating ‘ecosystem people’. Their work definitely helps in understanding the social economic position of tribal & non-tribal people who were at the subsistence level.

Several historians and anthropologists have done the categorisation of various popular protests. Kathleen Gough has focused on restorative and trans formative movements. E.J.Hobsbawn has deployed the concept of social banditry in studying pre-industrial Europe. He has differentiated between crime and revolt. Gough has also used this category. However Ranajit Guha has argued that while Hobsbawn has dubbed such protest as pre-political in pre-industrial Europe, however under colonial rule, aims and ideological basis of peasants revolts, though in nascent form were political in nature.

K.Suresh Singh in his analysis has pointed out the changing nature of various protest movements.

The presence of millenarian trends in popular uprisings has been studied by Stephen Fuchs in his ‘Rebellious Prophet’ the emergence of messianic leaders who emerged during times of ruptures between traditional and alien cultural norms has been highlighted by him.

31.2 DOMINANT FEATURES OF PRE-COLONIAL SOCIETY

Several researches have shown that pre colonial Indian society was not static. Though village was the basic unit of administration and social ties. India was mainly rural and was constituted by thousands of villages. However these were not ‘little republic’ as
Social Questions Under Colonialism

Colonial administrators dubbed them to show that villages were static and self-dependent, having no linkages with larger ‘political set-up’. The land revenue was the main source of income for the state. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, decline and disintegration of Mughal Empire was followed by the emergence of numerous successor states. During this period social structure was shaped by several elements. One of the most important elements was rooted in economic ties within village and between villages and urban centres.

The political turmoil of the later eighteenth century left its mark on the countryside. In the Delhi region, semi-tribal groups like the Gujars and Jats extended their settlements from the upper doab, to the arable ‘upland’ plain. Their settled village communities depicted hierarchy of traditional rights over land. There were either ‘primary’ or ‘secondary Zamindars’. Mostly there existed joint extended family management and partial ownership constituted the most common tenurial form. In Punjab, primary Zamindars were the cultivators. The bhaichara communities of the Jats owned land collectively. In the upper doab, primary land control rights were held by dominant castes that were elites in the society.

The relationship between groups of dominant peasant castes and service and artisan castes were shaped by the Jajmani system. It centred on the organization of production and distribution around the institution of hereditary occupational castes. The non-agricultural castes were either granted fixed village produce in lieu of their services or small plots of land. The prevalence of caste system did not denote rigid division - M.N. Srinivas has pointed out the process of upward mobility in several parts of India. Though service and occupational castes were free to sell their products within village or even outside, however there was a tendency towards a high degree of specialization. It resulted in close relationship between specific castes and occupations. The dagbar who made leather bags for holding Ghi and Sugar cane juice was socially and occupationally distinct from the Chamar manufacturing shoes, leather ropes and drumhead. The flexibility and mobility was evident in the fact that a very large proportion of the gentry in Bihar, both Hindu and Muslims, cultivated with their own hands. Brahmans were also farmers in the South.

In the tribal regions like Bengal, land hitherto held by tribals was gradually being claimed by dominant castes. While some tribal groups were hunters and gatherers, others were engaged in shifting cultivation. There was dependence on forest and water bodies. In the western ghats of Maharashtra, villages were formed by two castes groups of the Kunbis and Gavlis. The former living in the lower valley practised paddy cultivation. The Gavlis living on the upper hill terrace kept large herds of buffaloes and cattle. There was interdependence between both groups for obtaining necessities of life. In the state of Karnataka, in a village Masur, British Gazetteers noted the existence of thirteen different endogamous groups. Some of them were fishing communities, other were agriculturists, horticulturists and entertainers.

There were no direct linkages between caste and class. Within a caste, social differentiation existed on the basis of status and power. Infact the relations of domination and subordination were governed by moral codes. The low castes were required to obey and respect dominant castes. Within the family, patriarchal domination caused the subordination of women. Kinship and sexual status was also marked by difference in speech. In his description of Malabar in the nineteenth century, Logan noted—

‘The house itself is called by different names according to the occupant’s caste. The house of a Pariah is a cheri, while the agrestic slave –the cheraman-lives in Chala’.

In Gujarat a patidar youth was not allowed to initiate conversation in the company of his elders. In Orissa, a Bauri untouchable was not to speak to a high caste until spoken to. In parts of southern India, a servant would cover his mouth while receiving his master’s command. The objects of wear also constituted status symbol. Umbrella
and shoes were markers of high castes. In Gujarat, the so-called impure Mahars were not allowed to tuck up their loin cloths but had to trail it along the ground.

Thus social differentiation was buttressed by customary and cultural norms. The religious groups enjoyed power in tribals regions. There was faith in superstitions and rituals sanctioned by dominant religions. There existed village deities and also symbols of nature. The role of education was limited. It was the religious beliefs, which shaped the ritual practices and belief systems of people.

Within this milieu, several changing processes marked colonial intervention.

## 31.3 COLONIAL RULE AND RUPTURES IN SOCIETY

It was the East India Company, which had come to India for trade. Taking advantage of local polity, it laid the foundation of colonial rule from Bengal in the eighth-century. Irfan Habib has divided colonial rule of British into three distinct phases from monopolistic trading rights, company shifted to the policy of free trade in the early nineteenth century. After 1813, British declared themselves to be the ‘Paramount Power’ in India. The colonial expansion lasted till 1856. After suppressing the revolt of 1857, British converted India into the direct colony of Britain. In the subsequent years, colonial domination was further entrenched.

From the outset British evolved policies, which were meant to maximize their resources. The ideological basis of British rule rested upon the suppression of subject population. The advent of Christianity from eighteenth century was marked by the establishment of press, church, hospitals and orphanages. Alongside administrative structure was supported by the police and the army.

The established colonial hegemony led to disaffection of different social groups. The Dual System in Bengal (1765-1772) resulted in widespread famine claiming 1/3 of total population. The attempts of British to deprive locally influential Rajas, Zamindars and Military persons also caused tension.

As land was the main source of income for the state so British focused on the land revenue system. For this purpose Cornwallis introduced the Permanent settlement in 1793 in Bengal. Bihar and Orissa. During the same period, Monroe introduced the Ryotwari system in Madras. In 1835, William Bentinck introduced the Mahalwari system in North Western Province. It was further extended to Punjab. After annexing Punjab, in 1849, British introduced agrarian changes in the provinces. There was extensive canal colonisation in western Punjab. These agrarian changes not only augmented the resources of state but also gave birth to colonial sociology.

The colonial sociology encouraged land lordism. In canal colonies, supporters of Raj were given land, which led to settlement of Punjabis in western Punjab from central Punjab. Everywhere position of peasantry started declining.

The penetration of market forces and connection with capitalism led to commercialisation of agriculture. However numerous studies have shown that it only led to decline and indebtedness of peasantry. In pre-colonial times also small peasants had to borrow from village’s Banias. However in the existing network, peasants could not be evicted from their land. Under colonial rule, big merchants and Zamindars became the moneylenders. They used the legal system to deprive peasants of their land. The situation was worse in tribal regions where outsiders started settling as traders and moneylenders. In several places, tribal population could not understand the implication of established legal and administrative set up. There was hatred for outsiders or dikus as they were called.
Social Questions Under Colonialism

The process of deindustrialisation further deprived peasants of their source of income. Numerous village industries declined. The artisans were reduced to the position of labourers. They had to leave their villages in search of work. Their living conditions in industrial belts like Calcutta, Bombay and Kanpur were miserable. In this way, there was decline and disintegration of traditional ties symbolised by the Jajmani System.

As British declared themselves to be the owners of forest wealth, it directly affected the position of tribal communities which were dependent upon forest. It was in 1865 that an Act was passed which declared claims of the state over the forests. It was followed by the enactment of the Indian Forest Act of 1878. Under this Act, control of state over the resources of forests increased. Very limited rights were given to traditional tribal communities. Thus, there was ban on the shifting cultivation. The tribals as per their customs were not allowed to hunt and they were assigned limited space for their animals. The extension of railways network further led to penetration of rich trading classes into the distant areas of India. The development of plantation economy not only led to degradation of environment but the 'rule of records' as formed by the British led to the undermining of traditional rights.

Subjected to exploitation, various castes and communities responded in multiple ways. The web of relationships that had existed since pre-colonial times were sustained in several parts of India. Those who had been deprived of power and authority gained support from common people. Thus displaced rulers had the support of local population. Within specific regions, tribal population reacted against exploitation. In several cases intertribal affinities were formed.

The social religious reform movement in nineteenth century also had its bearing on small peasants, low caste groups and tribal population. There was influence of Christianity as well. There was affirmation of faith in specific belief systems. By late nineteenth century, as nationalism was evident in public domain and gradually it gave birth to mass nationalism, there was change also in the popular protest movements. While some retained their autonomy, others joined anti imperialist struggle.

31.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF POPULAR PROTESTS

In his assessment, Ranajit Guha has counted 118-protest movements between 1783-1900. Their number kept on rising in the twentieth century. It is not possible to analyse hundreds of these movements. However by focusing on the structure of protest, dominant characteristics of popular protests in colonial times can be pointed out:

1) In the initial years of British rule displaced rulers and military personnel reacted against colonial demands. For instance when Warren Hastings demanded money from Chet Singh, Raja of Banaras and when latter failed to give it, he was arrested. However people of Banaras supported Chet Singh and protested against colonial rule. The Bishenpur revolt of 1789 led by local ruler and supported by local people was also identical in nature. Between 1799-1800 Poligars who were deprived of their military power adopted Gorilla warfare to thwart the authority of British rulers. These were localised protests and rooted in specific causes.

2) In all popular protests, economic exploitation as perpetuated by the British rule caused tension. The land revenue policies and Forests laws led to resentment. Alongside exploitation of dominant Indian Zamindars and Moneylenders was also opposed. Thus the revolt of Sanyasis and Fakirs, which resulted from the famine of 1769-70, was directed against British rulers and local Zamindars in Bengal. The revolt of Kols (1831-32) and Bhumij (1832-33) was also rooted in colonial exploitation.
3) Many uprisings were restorative in nature. The rebels aimed to restore back pre-existing political structure and social and economic rights. There was protest against the penetration of alien authorities and outsiders. Thus in the revolt of 1857, leadership of traditional rulers was accepted. Alongside small peasants belonging to Jat and Rajputs also rose against alien rule. There were peaceful efforts to restore back what the protestors regarded their rights. Thus in the Pabna uprising of 1873-1883 tenant farmers hoped that the British rule was in favour of restoring back their landed rights.

4) In numerous uprisings there was protest against growing indebtedness. Thus the Deccan revolt of 1875 was against Marwaris moneylenders.

5) Violence was an integral part of popular protests. It was directed against oppressors.

6) Over the period of time, protest movements/uprisings became more organised. The role of charismatic leaders and religion in providing support and strength to rebels also became clear. Thus Titu Mir in rising against the exploitation of zamindars, who were Hindus, effectively used Islam in forging solidarity among his people. The millenarians trends were also evident in the revolt of Santals and Mundas.

7) In terms of seeking support it was found that inter-tribal and inter regional linkages were also formed. The revolts were only directed against exploiters. Thus, the Kinship ties, caste and tribal identities were permeated by class-consciousness.

8) The role of women was also apparent in the revolts of Santals, Mundas and Mopilahs. They were an integral part of families and communities. They helped their male folks in productive activities and during the time of tension, they also joined them in acts of violence.

9) Numerous historians have explored the nexus between popular movements and national movement. The role of Gandhian leadership in converting national movement into mass movement was also evident. During 1920s Kisan Sabhas in U.P and Bihar provided organizational skills to peasants. Similarly, the role of communists in leading peasants’ protests against colonial and feudal exploitation became explicit in 1940s.

The above-mentioned features can be analysed in detail by focusing on specific protests in colonial period.

31.5 KOL REVOLT

It erupted in some parts of Bihar in 1831-1832. Kols were agriculturalists. The growing land revenue and indebtedness caused socio-economic tension in the area. It was noted by British official Wilkinson that landlords and contractors had increased land revenue by 35%. There was resentment against the land revenue system as the British introduced it. The tension erupted when in 1831; twelve villages of Sinhari Manki in Sonpur were handed over to outsiders. They were reports about maltreatment being meted out to his sisters. It was also reported that one Munda women had been kidnapped in Singbhum. There was growing recognition that British policies had deprived Kols of their rights over land. It was against this exploitation that Kols of Sonpur, Tamar and Naundgoan were directed to assemble in Tamar. The decision was taken to avenge insult by indulging in acts of loot, killing and burning. They were also extended help by the Mundas. The revolt spread in Chotanagpur, Singhbhum and Palamau. Thus the revolt of Kols exhibited the tribal consciousness against exploitation. Their ability to unite their people and to secure help from other tribals residing in their vicinity was indicative of the fact that they were united in their protest against colonial exploiters.
31.6 SANTAL REVOLT

Santal revolt was characterised by class solidarity transcending ethnicity. There was not only well defined programme to resist exploitation but the leadership of Sido and Kanho was characterized by usage of spiritual codes to organise rebels. Before the outbreak, elaborate preparations were made. Both written and oral messages were used to solicit support. Above all, women also played an important role in the uprisings. The way this revolt started and spread over vast space showed that Santals were determined to combat their exploiters.

Santals lived in Birbhum, Singbhum, Hazari Bagh, Bhagalpur and Munger. They were agriculturalists. However the entrenchment of land lordism, usage of legal machinery by money lenders subjected them to continuous exploitation. As per the contemporary accounts of lawyer Degamber Chakravarty and Chhotre Dasmanj, Santals failed to comprehend the exploitative nature of British administration. Initially they hoped that their grievances would be redressed by the British officials. However when it did not happen, Santals decided to rise in revolt.

In leading Santals against growing exploitation, leadership was provided by Sido and Kanhu. They proclaimed divine sanction to lead the revolt. They issued parwanas containing their messages and directing local population to extend help to them. For it, they sought help from non tribal population like artisans and other service groups like the Dom, the Lohar and the Gwala. The defaulters were explicitly warned that they work loose their lives. Thus Sido and Kanhu exhorted their local populace to take up arms against exploiting money lender and British administrators. Thus one of the parwana sent by Sido and Kanho read, “the sahib and the white soldiers will fight. Kanoo and Seedoo manjee are not fighting. The thacoor himself will fight———”. They also observed, “The Mahajans have committed a great sin; The Sahibs and the amlah have made everything bad, in this the Sahibs have sinned greatly. Those who tell things to the magistrate and those who investigate cases for him, take 70 to 80 Rupees. with great oppression in this the Sahibs have sinned. On this account the Thacoor has ordered me saying that the country is not the Sahib”.

There were series of meetings in which tribal chiefs and local population outlined preparations for the revolt. It started in 1855 with series of dacoities in Bhagalpur, Birbhum and Bankure where Bengali landlords were attacked and their properties were looted. From the beginning looted goods were equally divided among rebels. There was participation of women in dacoities. There was appropriation of religious rituals practised by upper castes. For instance, Sido and Kanhu offered puja to Goddess Durga. For the performance of Puja, two Brahmins were abducted. It was also decided to march to Calcutta in order to present their grievances before the rulers. However brutal suppression by authorities who resorted to destruction of Santals villages and accumulated loot, led to weakening of the movement. Santals resorted to plundering for the purpose of sustaining themselves. However, eventually the army suppressed the revolt. There were arrests on large scale. Women were also arrested.

31.7 MUNDA UPRISINGS

The scholarly work of K.Suresh Singh on the history of Munda tribe reveals how this tribal community responded to going exploitation. The penetration of outsiders and colonial administration coupled with missionary activities created a milieu in which Birsa Munda provided the charismatic leadership and led the revolt in 1899-1900. The millenarian trends were evident in this uprising. The support of regional customary ties permeating different tribal groups helped in solidifying support for the Mundas. The leadership of Birsa Munda was successful in uniting exploited against the exploiters.
This tribe resided in the region south of Ranchi. The land holdings were based on tribal lineages or the Khuntkatti land system. This was eroded by merchants and money lenders who penetrated into their area as contractors and landlords. There was recruitment of indentured labour. To redress their grievances, Mundas resorted to peaceful methods. They sought help from missionaries. However there was no change in their position.

The growing resentment resulted in the protest of tribal chiefs—Sardars. They tried to dislodge the alien landlords and also tried to put an end to forced labour. In this, they sought help of a Calcutta based Anglo-Indian lawyer. However they were cheated. It led to the feeling that both Sarkar and he missionaries had done nothing to resolve their problems. They had to seek help from within their community.

It came in the form of Birsa Munda. He was born in 1874. His father was a sharecropper. Initially, he received education from the missionaries. He was also influenced by Vaishnava religion. The practitioner of vaishnavas had led a movement in 1893-94 to prevent village waste land being taken over by the forest department. Birsa Munda also came under the influence of Christianity and mixed many of its beliefs in his religious and spiritual formulations. It was in 1895 that he had a vision of a supreme God. He claimed himself to be a prophet having miraculous healing powers. Soon thousands of people flocked to hear the ‘new word’ proclaiming an immediate deluge. For extending help to the Sardars in their struggle, Birsa was jailed in 1895. After two years, when he was released, Birsa had become more determined to fight against oppression. In 1898-99, a series of night meetings were held in the forest. Birsa exhorted gatherers to kill ‘Thakedars, Jagirdars, Rajas, Hakims and Christians’. He promised that ‘the guns and the bullets of enemies would turn into water’. There was faith in his miraculous powers.

The uprising began in 1899 on Christmas Eve. The Mundas shot arrows and tried to burn down Churches in Ranchi and Singhbhum. They also targeted the police. However they were defeated at Sail Rakab hill on January 9. There was arrest of Birsa Munda who died in jail. Many hundreds of Mundas were arrested and were punished. Though the Munda uprising failed to redress grievances of local population but the vision of Birsa Munda survived and kept on inspiring the local people.

31.8 MOPLAH UPRISINGS

Between 1836-1919, Moplahs rose 28 times against the exploitation of Jennis or landlords. There was participation of only 349 Moplahs in these outbreaks. However what distinguished their violent revolt was the permeation of Islam in inducing them to rise against the landlords. Though illiterate Moplahs did not understand the doctrines of Islam correctly but they believed that by killing Jennis and then by facing death, they would attain martyrdom. In this form of protest, they were symbolically prepared by their wives.

Moplahs lived in Malabar where they were either lease holders—Kanamdars or cultivators—Verumpattandars. They were Muslims and were subjected to the growing authority of Hindu upper caste landlords. These were Namboordi and Nair Jennis. The British policies further strengthened their hold over Moplahs. They lived in small villages and had very limited resources. It was the mosque, which provided them identity. The number of mosques rose in Malabar from 637 in 1831 to 1058 by 1851. They also came under the influence of Sayyid Alwawi and his son Fadl who were Tangals of Mambram near tirurangadi. It were in Ernad and Walluvanad taluks of South Malabar that revolts started. Many Jennis were killed. Most of Moplah martyrs were poor peasants. Thus some historians see it as a class struggle, which was permeated by religious ideology.
31.9 PUNJAB DISTURBANCES OF 1907

The process of canal colonisation in western Punjab was rooted in the rule of British paternalism. Large tracts of land were colonised by carefully selecting different caste and status groups. The crown tenants were granted the right to purchase land after completing an initial period of probation. Many big landlords emerged in this region. The existing laws were manipulated. The local lower level bureaucracy extorted money to prevent punishment to the potential defaulters. Subjected to everyday administrative interference, resentment grew in several canal areas.

It exploded in the form of the agrarian agitation of 1907. The discontent of peasants resulted from a series of government measures. The Punjab land colonisation bill was introduced in the Punjab council on October 25, 1906. It sought to alter the conditions on which land was granted to colonists in the canal colonies. In November 1906, the government ordered enhancement in the canal water rates on the Bari Doab canal. It provided water for irrigation in the district of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Lahore. The increased rate was up to 50 percent. The land revenue in the Rawalpindi district was also enhanced. More over the colonization Bill of 1906 sought to legalize the imposition of fines for infringements of the conditions laid down for grant of land. These were to remain outside the purview of courts. The law of primogeniture for inheritance was stressed. There was even bar on the purchasing of the land by the colonists.

Subjected to these restrictions, peasants started their agitation. Not only there was a breakdown in rural and urban divide but also peasants cutting across religious differences joined the struggle. The big Zamindars Association took the lead. With the coming of Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai, agitation became wide spread. Numerous public meetings were held to criticise government’s measures. Eventually the government had to yield. The viceroy vetoed the colonization Bill. The Punjab government also withdrew the enhancement of water rates. The agitation symbolised radicalization of peasantry and its linkages with nationalism.

31.10 KISAN SABHAS AND BABA RAMCHANDRA

David Hardiman has observed that by the end of nineteenth century, there was emergence of peasant nationalism. By the time mass nationalism had emerged under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, there was widespread influence of Congress in many parts of India. In U.P, numerous Kisan sabhas had emerged. When the Non-Cooperation movement started in 1921, Kisan Sabhas provided the recruitment ground for Satyagrahis. However autonomy of Kisan Sabhas and their participation in anti-imperialists struggle was also evident in Southeast Avadh. Here, Baba Ramchandra provided the leadership. His domination over peasants was resented by the Congress leadership, which wanted peasants participation to be non-violent in nature. However peasants rose in widespread agrarian riots in Rae Bareli, Pratapgarh, Fyzabad and Sultanpur between January and March 1921. Not only bazaars were attacked, the houses and crops of Talukdars and property of merchants was also targeted. On January 6, 1921, 10000 peasants attacked Fursatganj bazaar in Rae Bareli and resorted to fixing of prices for grain and cloth. There were also clashes with police. The subversion of colonial authority was evident in setting up of peasants’ panchayats to redress their grievances. Thus through Kisan sabhas, peasants were organising themselves. They also responded to mass nationalism. However, they also exhibited consciousness, which was cognitive of exploitation being perpetuated by big landlords and merchants. That's why attempt of Congress to channelise them in peaceful struggle directed only against authorities failed.
During 1930s and 1940s peasants had come under the influence of Kisan Sabhas, Congress and Communist ideology. In several states, violent protests were led by feudal exploitation and the control of land by feudal lords was strongly resented. It was in Telengana that the biggest peasant guerrilla war occurred between July 1946 and October 1851. It spread over 16,000 square miles covering 3000 villages. Nearly three million people participated in the struggle.

It was in Telengana that lower caste, tribal peasants and debt slaves were subjected to exploitation of Muslims and high caste deshmukhs and Jagirdars. The state of Hyderabad under Asafjahi Nizams was also indifferent. The influence of communists spread during world war II. They had used the Andhra Mahasabha to spread their influence. They also provided leadership in leading struggle against local issues. There was also massive collection of arms by peasants.

The revolt began when on July 4, 1946, thugs employed by the deshmukh of Viunar in Jangaon taluka of Nalgonda murdered a village militant. The latter was involved in struggle to defend a land of poor washerwoman. Very soon, the movement spread into the district of Warangal and Khammam. From early 1947 small bands were formed. They used guerrilla warfare resulting in disappearance of Vetti and bonded labour. Not only agricultural wages were increased but also in several instances, confiscated land was returned back to previous peasants holders. Even wastelands were redistributed. Sundarayya, a leading figure in the armed struggle had shown in his narrative, how socio-economic equality was sought to be established in the liberated areas. There was wide spread influence of the communist leaders. However strong military action and indifference of better off peasants led to slackening of influence of communist leaders. They were driven out from the settled plains of Nalgonda, Warangal and Khamman. They had to make Nallamallia hills across the Krishna to the south and the Godavari region to the northeast as their base. Chenchu and Koya tribals were organised. However gradually by 1950-51, guerrilla action degenerated into occasional murders. Though the Telengana movement could not benefit tribals but the regime of Hyderabad was destroyed. Andhra Pradesh was formed on linguistic lines and Jagirdari was also abolished.

**31.11 TELEGANNA**

**31.12 SUMMARY**

The above-mentioned narrative indicates the popular movements denoted struggle of dispossessed and exploited peasants and tribals. Their social milieu was tied down by co relationship with several other caste groups. The colonial rulers through their administrative set up also subjected them to exploitation. There was penetration of outsiders into their region. Over the period of time, several protests sought redressal of their grievances in peaceful way. They also responded to the call of dispossessed local Rajas in their struggle against colonial rulers. However, over the period of time, there was recognition that both rulers and Indian dominant groups were exploiting them. Most of popular protests remained localized. During the time of revolts, they used existing social ties cutting across ethnicity. There was also influence of religions. In an era of mass nationalism, these protests came to exhibit class consciousness. Autonomous leadership provided the ideological basis and all India based movement led by the congress. The growing influence of communists also became apparent. Thus both leadership and specified goals came to characterise popular uprisings.
31.13 GLOSSARY

Vanis : Village Mahajans
Thangals : Priests in malabar
Jenmis : Landlords of Malabar region
Social Banditry : a term used by E.J.Hobsbawm, to point out acts of violence in pre industrial Europe by poor people. These were not criminal acts but were result of collective action by poor people to redress their grievances
Deshmukhs : revenue collector turned landlords.
Restorative Movement : a term used by Kathleen Gough to study those protest movements of peasants and tribals, which aimed at restoring pre-colonial political set up.
Transformative Movements : These denoted strong organisational set up and well defined ideological base. Leaders, who after subverting colonial authority aimed at establishing new order in the region often, led these. Such set up was meant to grant rights and privileges to exploited people.
Insurgency : Acts of violence/protests by peasants
Millenarianism : Stephan Fuchs studied these movements under this concept, which were marked by the emergence of messianic leaders. They drew inspiration of various religious and promised their followers new world where in they were to enjoy their rights.

31.14 EXERCISES

1) Assess the role of British policies in undermining the rights of peasants in nineteenth century India
2) Briefly describe the dominant features of popular protests in the nineteenth century
3) Describe the role of religion in the Moplah and Munda uprisings.
4) Assess the contribution of Ranajit Guha and K. Suresh Singh in the historiography of popular uprisings in colonial India.
5) Briefly describe the Telengana struggle of 1946-1951.