

Peasant Revolt In Sultanpur District A History From Below

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Abstract

The peasant movement has contributed significantly to the national movement. This not only strengthened its base but also highlighted the problems of the farmers on the national level. In the twentieth century, there was a peasant movement in many areas of India; one of them was the peasant movement of Awadh. Many scholars have presented their views on Awadhi's peasant movement. But this paper is focused on Sultanpur district of Awadh. An attempt has been made to study the origin, nature and resistance of peasants against the British ruler and zamindars. Primary sources, secondary sources, newspapers and other archival sources have been consulted to prepare this research paper.

Introduction-

18th century has been important in Indian history. On this one side, the Mughal dynasty was towards the end, the same new power British east India Company was establishing its control. The main objective of East India Company was to maximize their revenue through the various methods. Agriculture was the main source of income in the earlier governments, so to increase their income; the British government first emphasized on agricultural policy and formulated three types of land revenue policy. They were Permanent Settlement, Ryotwari Settlement and Mahalwari Settlement. All these three policies were implemented in different regions of India. While Permanent Settlement was implemented in Bengal, Bihar and Varanasi, Ryotwari Settlement was implemented in Madras and Mahalwari Settlement in Punjab and some areas of Awadh.¹ Apart from the Mahalwari settlement in the Awadh area, there was another system called Talukdari settlement.² Before British rule in the Talukdars of Oudh formed the dominant class of rent collecting intermediaries, managing to build estates, organise a local following, and thus acquiring an independent political power status. Their traditional power was first threatened by the British annexation of Oudh.³ At first the British considered them a reactionary and oppressive class and hence their land settlement policy was aimed at weakening the Talukdars. However, in 1857 revolt the Talukdars participated against the British had convinced them that they wielded considerable power and following. The government therefore regarded as natural friends.⁴ Governor General of Oudh decided in favour of Talukdari settlement and came into force first may 1858.⁵ Being a part of Oudh region the Talukdari settlement was also introduced in Sultanpur district.

British policy and Peasants

Sultanpur was bounded on the north by Bara Bank and Fyzabad; on the east by Azamgarh and Jaunpur; on the south by Jaunpur and Partabgarh; and on the west by Rae Bareli and Bara Banki. The district assumed its present shape in 1869. The District contains 2,458 villages and only one town, the houses of the people being scattered in small hamlets. The population at the four enumerations was as follows:

Sr.no	Year	Population
1	(1869)	1,040,227
2	(1881)	957,912
3	(1891)	1,075,851
4	(1901)	1,083,904

There are four tehsils—Sultanpur, Amethi, Musafirkhana and Kadipur. Brahmans are the most numerous caste, numbering 159,000, or 17 per cent of the total. Other castes numerically important are:

Sr.no	Caste	works	numbers
1	Chamars	(tanners and cultivators)]	140,000
2	Ahirs	Graziers and cultivators	29,000
3	Rajputs		87,000
4	Muraos	(market-gardeners	45,000
5	Kurmis	agriculturists	38,000
6	Pasis	toddy-drawers	38,000
7	Koris	weavers	35,000

Brahmans, Raj-puts, Mitts, Kum's, Muraos, and Chamars are the chief cultivating castes.⁶ There were 34 Talukdars in Sultanpur. The Talukdars of Amethi paid more than Rs.2 lakh as land revenue. Three Talukdars paid between 50 thousand to one lakh, 7 paid 25 thousand to Rs.49 thousand and 23 paid less than 25 thousand.⁷ F.W. Brownrigg, the Settlement Officer of Sultanpur District, finds both "demand for revenue" and "rent realized increased."⁸ Collections on account of land revenue and revenue from all sources have been, in thousands of rupees:-

Sr.no		1880-81	1890-91	1900-01	1903-04
1	Land Revenue	1068	1177	1415	1466
2	Total Revenue	1199	1596	1983	2055

The first Rent act of Oudh, Imperial Act XIX of 1868 gave heritable rights of occupancy to those tenants who had been able to show that they had formerly been proprietors “within 30 years preceding the annexation”.⁹ The majority of tenants were without any rights and their rent could be increased freely by landlords. The tenants could be evicted at a month’s notice at the end of each year.¹⁰ The 25,744 notices were given to tenants in 1869-70 but only 4181 evicted. The main purpose of this notice was to convince the tenants of their terms, not to evict them from the land¹¹. Rent was continuously increased in Awadh between 1858 and 1882 and was amplified to about 26.8% in Sultanpur¹². Due to the increase of rent, farmers were constantly borrowing money and getting stuck in their clutches of Mahajan and Bania and about 80 percent tenants were under pressure on increased tax.¹³ The condition of the tenants was getting miserable. In this sequence, the British Government passed the Awadh Rent Act 1887. But this act also did not provide any relief to the tenants. In 1888, 2369 notices were issued which increased respectively in other years to 4233 in 1889, 6119 in 1890 and 8422 in 1891. In Sultanpur, the Rent Act was illegally increased to 33 percent. In Sultanpur, the Rent Act was illegally increased to 33 percent that demoralized tenants.¹⁴ Another method was created to exploit the tenants was the practice of Nazarna. In this, the tenants had to pay some extra tax to the Talukdars, which were different in the districts of Awadh. The tenants who could not do this were evicted from the land. The eviction of land in Sultanpur increased from 2326 in 1905-06 to 3972 in 1920-21.¹⁵ Apart from this, taxes like Ghodavan, Murdafaroshi, Motravan, Hathiavan and Nazardaura also broke the back of farmers. During the First World War, the Talukdars had to fight with themselves. Raja Pratap Bahadur Singh of Sultanpur arranged donations by putting extra pressure on the farmers and also recruited people for the war.¹⁶

Repression and Resistance-

The peasants started a revolt against the exploitation of the British and the Talukdars. The leaders of this movement were Kedarnath, Dev Narayan and Raghunandan Sadhu.¹⁷ He not only made the farmers aware in Sultanpur but also organized them. The Dalits had a predominance of the Chamar caste in this district. But most of them used to work at very low wages.¹⁸ According to the census there were a total of 82,959 agricultural labourers out of which 50,670 were males and 32289 females.¹⁹ Peasants’ leaders, through their speeches and various programs, used to motivate the farmers to revolt and at the same time they pledged to uproot this system. According to the census there were a total of 82,959 agricultural labourers out of which 50,670 were males and 32289 females.²⁰ The administration began to suspect these activities and they were apprehensive that no incident should happen and damage had to be done.²¹ Therefore the British officer arrested those peasant leaders and they were prosecuted. At his arrest, no peasants are uncontrolled and peace remains, so the then deputy commissioner called the army in the neighbouring district Faizabad.²² But the Imperial Government thought it better to transfer its cases to Lucknow for trial, on the other hand sending troops to "troubled" areas to terrorize the people.²³

The Deputy Commissioner of Sultanpur led the movement of soldiers. Encouraged by the news of the arrival of the troops, the district administration resorted to a policy of repression. It arrested

twenty people in village Rawanian after the Kisan Sabha meeting was declared illegal.²⁴ The government and the zamindars together terrorized the peasants. In this sequence, Thakurindin Tiwari, Swaraj Bali Pandey and Basdev Pandey were arrested from the village of Badaundih for making seditious speeches.²⁵ The deputy commissioner arrested four "ring leaders" who "intimidated" zamindars. The prisoners were marched with soldiers, perhaps to topple their followers and were then convicted in Kadipur²⁶. Several people were sentenced to imprisonment by a Sub-Divisional Officer on charges of offenses on which they committed offenses during the month. There was a huge demonstration of force in Chandan, Lambhua and Baraunsa, the "worst affected villages" of the district by the peasants²⁷. Villagers and schoolchildren were asked to line up on the roadside and give salute soldiers, who marched to the tune of the infantry band. The march was officially described as an unqualified success and culminated in a widely organized attack on the forces of disarray in the districts, ranging from violent agitation to absolute calm in less than a month²⁸.

On 6 January, Dev Narayan in Sultanpur was sentenced to one week's imprisonment for insulting the school's inspector on Prasad's question²⁹. He was taken to prison as a hero. Dev Narayan and Kedarnath reached Baskhari on 17th to ascertain the extent of the police's generosity. "Their presence was an eye for the zamindars"³⁰. The villagers were forced to make offerings to the soldiers. It was demonstrated to the people that rasad was the authority of a "government enforced by law", which was not to be implemented with any logic and apology³¹. Refusal to supply Rasad was punished as a result. In Daulatpur, those who refused were fined. Under Section 107 of the Criminal Procedure Code, Rs 7 was fined³². Dev Narayan accused the police of abetting the assault. On 20 January, he sat outside the police station to apologize to the station officer. The news of the attack brought a large number of farmers to the Baskhari and soon 7000 to 10,000 people surrounded the police station. However, the crowd remained patient at Dev Narayan's insistence. When the officials complained of armed mob, Dev Narayan himself collected some 300 sticks and deposited them in the police station (police station). But the crowd refused to disperse except for the orders of their own leaders. A large number of police forces were present outside. He left no room for doubt about the peasant movement.³³ In this way, the zamindars and British government tried their best to suppress the movement but they were not completely successful

Conclusion-

Thus we see that the peasant revolt of Sultanpur stems from the problems of the peasants at that time. He was being led by the local leader of this rebellion. This protest was against colonial policies and exploitation of zamindars and Talukdars. The Talukdars had many economic and political rights in these systems. The Talukdars played an important role in stabilizing British power. Therefore, the poor peasants exploited the landless labourers and pushed them into the darkness of poverty and these problems united and motivated them for the movement.

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