

## **CHAPTER- II**

### **RISE OF SOCIALISTIC TREND IN INDIA DURING 1850s**

In the year 1793 the major land system was introduced by British authority that means East India Company. Lord Cornwallis introduced the system in 1793 better for East India Company was not an end in itself. The system ushered in a new era in the economic history of Bengal in the late eighteen century. The new set up not only aimed at establishing some kind of order in a confused state of the economy since 1765, which was convenient for the East India Company; but it brought in its wake new complications that affected different segment of Bengal as well as India in different ways. It is well known that the set up of 1793 was introduced keeping in view the conditions in lower Bengal and particularly those in settled areas. But the set up was soon to penetrate deep in other distant areas inhabited by the rural peasant and as well as tribal people or masses whose structure, age old beliefs and notions, social and economic patterns were quite distinct from those of the rest of the people of Bengal. The impact of the new set up introduced in 1793 on a predominately tribal area and a study of the tension it had produced among a particular tribal group would, therefore, be a fascinating enquiry. This impact had presented a profound challenge to the entire economic and social fabric of the peasants whatever may be the tribal people or peasant and masses as a whole and it did not remain unanswered.

If we look over the Jungle Mahal it was not destined to last long. The Government law and order during the period 1800 to till 1855 were not proved sufficient enough to safeguard the peasants' interest in the area. Peasants mean the tribal people who were

engaged in agricultural sector. The total ignorance of the tribal peasants or people about the existing revenue laws, the non-tribal land and money lenders gradually encroached upon the tribal rights in land. The people of this area had not even the access to the complicated legal remedy. The age old rights of the tribal in the jungles were curtailed as a result of the establishment of commercial centres which were trying to have exclusive rights over the jungles. The masses or the workers or the peasants who belonged to tribal community were reclaiming the jungle lands. But the zaminders were misappropriating the entire profit out of it without making any least effort for the improvement of the cultivation. The British East India Company extended their profit by indigo cultivation. This kind of profit mentality of English East India Company was depriving the peasants of the fertile land. Though the trouble arose over a question of disputed succession, the issue was soon taken up by the Bhumij caste as well as the likeminded tribes. The zaminders had not the least enterprise for the improvement and extension of agriculture, so that the peasants might get fair price of their produce. The zaminders liked to be surrounded with forests and to live segregated. The new administrative set up did not bring any considerable relief to the inhabitants of the erstwhile masses or peasants, and the common men they had all the time ignored.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the agrarian condition in British India had undergone rapid changes leading to pauperization of the peasantry. In consequence, peasant struggle against British Empire began to erupt in a number of regions that remained under British imperialistic rule. This struggle against imperialistic rule or aggressive mentality slowly spread across the masses which included peasants, workers, common people in one path or revolts lap.

In the permanent settlement, along with economic exploitation by the East India Company, this was based on the system of rent. The zaminders perpetuated many types of extra-economic coercion, complacent in the shadow of firm support extended to them by the imperial government through the institution of permanent settlement; the zaminders were exhibiting unheard of arrogance. The court of directors referred to the heavy arrears on the settlement of the last few years and expressed their opinion that with a view to avoiding such defalcations in future a permanent settlement of revenue should be made estimate in its amount on reasonable principles for the payment of which the hereditary tenure of the possessor should be the only necessary security.<sup>1</sup> The peasants aimed at preventing such arrogance which was growing by British East India Company. The permanent settlement created a class of parasitic landlords who, by and large, were interested neither in the improvement of agriculture in the contemporary cultural and social awaking. However without any plan or even conscious effort as sporadic, spontaneous features, some of the peasants of Bihar and surrounding area slowly started adopting the gathering method for fight against the exploitative policy of the East India Company.

Socialism has an older ancestral origin than democracy in the sense that the debate of equality and inequality is as old as civilization itself. Ever since Plato lamented that every city is a city of two-one of the rich and the other of the poor, and Aristotle's caution that inequality everywhere is the cause of revolution the question of creating a just, equal stable and efficient society has been the core of political speculation. Ideas and honour as a pre-requisite to a just society, and concern for the poor oppressed and the deprived have always been a part of intellectual thinking. However socialism, like

democracy as we understand it, is essentially a modern concept. It arose first out of commercialization (whatever may be commercialization of agriculture or may be commercialization of daily use commodities) and then became a reaction to the Industrial Revolution which decisively shaped human societies and lives. Socialism instead proposed a society based on equality, cooperation and sociability. Socialism through violent revolutions, while others stressed on peaceful and gradual change. Some claimed that they had discovered the laws of historical development and projected socialism as the inevitable destiny, while others remained content in just projecting what they considered to be a perfect society.<sup>2</sup> Marx was a revolutionary and a socialist but, above all, a humanist who believed that genuine emancipation and liberation of human beings would be brought about by their own efforts, socialism in India necessitated that certain restrictions were imposed on property rights and that the growth of monopoly was prevented. Equality is a very essential part of socialism. Equality is an essential concept for the study of political life at any time or in any place whereas the notion of equality has only a limited relevance. Equality, it might be said, is an ideal or principle, something men aim at or by reference to which they guide their conduct, power and authority, on the other hand, correspond to certain enduring features of human relationship, especially when men live under government or in states. Equality is characteristically a reforming idea and since the periods in human history when the zeal for improvement in an egalitarian direction constitute a fraction of man's total political experience the idea has only an intermittent importance. We may also be concerned with equality in a somewhat different sense that brings it closer in type to concepts such as power and authority when we focus our attention on the ways that wealth, power, rights and opportunities are

distributed among the members of a society. But while in that sector of society inequality has come against the spot of equality then there is a growing wavering condition which may be non-cooperation tendencies or may be Revolution tendencies. The inequalities which have struck men as unjust and stirred them to protest are of course the differences in political and social status, in the distribution of wealth and the opportunities for self development, rather than the differences between persons in ability, personality, or esteem. In human societies have for the most part been divided into classes or groups whose members have been distinguished by possession or lack of various advantages, opportunities, rights, powers, and privileges. Most political philosophers and social theorists have recognized and attached importance to this phenomenon, both as a significant explanatory factor and as something that needs either to be accepted, and perhaps justified, or condemned and therefore changed. “The India people feel that their construction (Railway) is undertaken principally in the interests of English commercial and moneyed classes, and that it assists in the further exploitation of our resources”. This statesman argued by G. K. Gokhale. Gokhale just highlights the then economic condition and also the economic exploitation of the East India Company by his argument. The construction of railways had a revolutionary impact on the life, culture, and economy of the Indian people. Not till their establishment could the British truly penetrate Indian life, link India with the growing world market, and set it on the path of capitalist development. As a matter of fact railways began, in course of time, to be looked upon by the alien rulers of the country as a panacea for all its economic ills, and their development was pressed on the vigour and vehemence, getting priority over everything else.

Here we also mention that the agrarian problem was perhaps the most important economic problem facing India at the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Agriculture constituted the main economic activity of the people nearly about eighty percent of the population depending on it for livelihood. The progressive realization of the country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the initial impact of British supremacy had accentuated the traditional dependence of Indians on agriculture. In the words of R.C. Dutta if agriculture prospered, the people were well off, if crops failed, there was famine in the land.<sup>3</sup> Besides Indian agriculture was extremely backward and the agriculturist very poor. As a result of a large number of historical factors, India came to have, by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a medley of system of land tenure and land revenue. In Bengal it was held by landlords under the system of permanent settlement according to which they paid permanently fixed land revenue to the Government. In Northern India land held by landlords or village communities who paid a land assessment that was revised by periodic new settlements of revenue. Under the ryotwari system prevailing in Bombay and Madras, land was held by peasant proprietors, who paid land revenue directly to the state, the revenue being assessed on each individual holding separately and regularly revised at each new settlement<sup>4</sup>. The principles determining the pitch of revenue also varied according to the time and place during the rule of the East India Company; but by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a more or less uniform principle had been evolved, at least in theory, for all parts of the country not covered by the permanent settlement. The land revenue policy of the Government of India was a major cause of the poverty and destitution of the peasant and of the backwardness of Agriculture. This theme or frame has helped the peasants, masses to raise their voices against the British exploitation.

By 1830s, after half a century of minimal government, the British began to gain control of the administrative problem. The official favour shown by the home government to the active type of administration set up in the North West provinces must inevitably have rebounded on the Bengal Government. Bentinck's administration (1828-34) reflected the need for economy in administration and he appointed Finance Committee and resolved for strong Government by the Union of the Offices of Collector and magistrate<sup>5</sup>. If we look to the outbreak of Santal Rebellion we can find that this Revolt is a contribution to the understanding of cultural continuity among the basically non-literate Santal villagers who are bound to their land in the Santal Paraganas of Bihar. These communities have been subjected to highly aggressive assimilative pressures during the past century and half. The factors which have served to preserve their right deserve the attention of those interested masses. Assimilative pressures have been exerted through a number of broad traditions of which the Pan Indian rural tradition has been the most influential. Its influence has been exerted to incorporate the Santal People into that form of the village community, life and peasant economy which was developed under the laissez fair policies of British administration, especially in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>.

Santal, Hul was one of the fiercest battles in the history of Indian freedom struggles causing greatest number of loss of lives. The number of casualties of Santal Hul was 20,000 according to Hunter who wrote it in annals of Rural Bengal. The Santal Hul of 1855 was master minded by the four brothers' Sidhu - Khanu, Chand and Bhairav; a heroic episode in India's prolonged struggle for freedom<sup>7</sup>. It was heroic episode because during that time they had tried to among all masses within one revolt's lap

against the exploitation. It was in all probability, the fiercest spontaneous rebellion in India prior to Great Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. With the capture of political and economic power by the East Indian Company, the natural habitats of the Adivasi (Indigenous) people including the Santals began to settle by the intruders like money lenders, traders and revenue farmers, who descended upon them in large numbers under the patronage of the company.

The Santals were exploited by both colonial East India Company and also their collaborators, native immigrants. Tribal and peasant struggles which took place during various phases of British rule, the historical development of these movements during this period which can reflect the varieties of forms and methods adopted by these movements. The British East Indian company's Government had to face perhaps the biggest of tribal insurrections in India with the great Santal people in 1855. During this time the Britishers or the officers of the East India Company who had till then not known what a clash with tribal people meant, had to set themselves too seriously think about this problem. That is why we find them more cautious and more careful in dealing with the Santals and at the same time with the Mundas, another great tribe of this country soon followed a spate of revolts spearheaded by the Indian war of Independence of 1857 which rocked the British Empire to its foundation.

The tribal too initiated struggles to safeguard their honour, to protect redress against the money lender, the zaminder and other parasitic land holders. It cannot be said that they under rated the strength of the enemy nor were they over estimating their own strength. They knew that their primitive arms could not silence the Britishers' guns. They also realized that the non-tribal India would not make common cause with their struggle.



They should have also been aware that ultimately they have to rely upon their own strength and yet they gave a heroic fight for the simple reasons that they could not avoid it much less postpone it.

The late Dr. B.S. Guha for a long time, the Director of the Department of Anthropology, Government of India, who contributed a great deal to the anthropological lore in this country, reviewing the disturbances that occurred in the tribal areas, observed that the underlying causes of Santal uprisings were the deep dissatisfaction created among the tribal people, against exploitation by their more advanced neighbours. Enumerating a few of these uprisings; the learned Anthropologist stated 'several uprisings of the tribal people took place beginning from Mal Paharia rising in 1772, the Mutiny of the Hos of Singhbhum in 1831, the Khond uprising in 1846, to the Santal rebellion of 1855. In like manner a punitive expedition 1744 by the Company's Government and in 1833 the confederacy of Khasi Chiefs was defeated by the British Army. But they established gathering one way against British East India Company<sup>8</sup>.

Just as there has been a clash of economic interests in the various tribal uprisings, there has been a clash of cultures also between the tribal and non-tribal vested interests, bulwarked by the ruler or the ruling authorities, who in their initial stages of administration and unsettled authority had to lean upon the educated and the landless classes, who were potential trouble makers – a policy continuously followed by the British throughout their rule in this country, which even the present administration is not yet quite able to replace by a thoroughly democratic people's rule. The two types of interests were closely entwined and were sometimes supplying the necessary momentum to each other. The tribal reacted forcibly when his religious beliefs were scoffed at, when

his independence was attacked, when his traditional, customs and manners, civic rights, judicial systems, standards of etiquette and prestige and code of honour were brushed aside and deep rooted conventions ignored and insulted and violated. According to Santals and other tribal conception the land (cultivable land) of any village was not alienable by any one individual and was the common property of all. Distribution and redistribution of all village land was affected by the village council of elders and all clearings of the jungle, as well as the sowing and harvesting were carried out under the supervision and initiation of the village priests and elders. The residents of any village could use and improve separate plots of land allotted to them and if any family had more members and required more land they could under instructions from the elders annex more land. When these well established conventions were ignored by the European rulers who had been given to an individualistic and not to a collective pattern of living, the clash became inevitable. One of the main reasons why tribal people in this sub-continent feel disunited, isolated and thwarted is the gradual land steady temptation to which they succumbed in the past one hundred years, by allowing themselves to be easily converted by powerful religious missions, foreign as well as indigenous, not because they really believed that their pattern of faith was inferior to that of others, but because through conversion they fondly hoped to secure economic betterment, freedom from exploitation and relief from the shahukar's or Mahajan's (Money lenders) harassment.

Dr. J.H. Hutton too had remarked in his work *Modern India and the west*, in which "the best land (of the tribal) passed into the hand of outsiders." It may not be correct to suppose that the tribal revolts were un-connected with the general popular discontent resulting from the ruthless exploitation engineered by the British East India

Company's unscrupulous and commercial administration. Though the eruptions of this unrest took firm shape from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, trouble was undoubtedly brewing virtually in every part of the country among almost every section of the people, like the peasants, intelligentsia, trading communities, the military, the scions of native royal dynasties, who were deprived of their territories by the application of the doctrine of Lapse, conquest and various other pretexts found for justifying annexation. The peasants were badly hit by rack renting by the zaminders and rich land holders and reduced to poverty owing to the unhelpful attitude of the company's courts, which were mostly supporting the claims of the vested interests of the creditors. It was clear to every litigant that the then Government was solidly behind the vested interests though they took shelter under some law or other, either imported from their own country or by a tortuous interpretation of the prevailing local laws. They did not take notice of the Indian conditions of tenancy, collective, inalienable ownership; of land and other time honoured practices, which assured the actual tiller undisturbed and continued right to enjoy the land, which is an ancestor tilled. The revolts of the tribal people were not isolated and on the other hand shared many features in common with the revolts of non-tribal, agrarian and small trading communities. For various reasons that particular period might have been chosen by the suffering masses to ventilate their grievances in an organized manner. The country was disturbed all over with wars between one ruler and another, mostly fermented by the company's skilful civil servants.

In the second half of the nineteenth century was the beginning of a new kind of peasant struggle in India, which entered mostly on the rent question. Broadly speaking the peasants rose in struggles against enhancement of rent, evictions and exactions of

land lords who were often money lenders. Apparently, the peasants wanted to loosen the bonds of feudal exploitation. If we look deeply into the matter of exploitation we can see here exploiter was common for all sectors that was East India Company or land lords, money lenders, zaminders, Mahajan who were appointed by the East India Company. Evidence that has accumulated in recent years makes it clear that all categories of peasants were involved in these agrarian struggles.

The peasant movements in mid nineteenth century were intermittent and remained confined to a few regions. What is remarkable is that these movements were becoming secular, cutting, across caste and communal barriers. It is not worthy that the Farazi Movement which grew in early nineteenth century in Barasat, Faridpur, Dacca and Barisal was essentially a movement of the Farazi Sect and hardly spread among Hindu and tribal peasants. The pagalpanthis of Sherpur represented a puritanical sect of the Muslims, between 1765 and 1850 some disturbances flared up in different parts of India, although peasants' masses were involved in these struggles<sup>9</sup>. These struggles revealed peasant discontent but hardly brought to the fore the rent question that exacerbated the relations between landlords and their tenants.

The nineteenth century witnessed the long series of tribal rebellions which could be related to the disintegration of the tribal system. The tribal peasants were losing their land and forests when the work of reclamation was done, the Santal was ousted and his land was leased to those who could pay high cash rent to the East India Company. When money rent proved to be less profitable than produce rent, the land owner thought it wise to swing over the share cropping. Tribal rebellions, by and large, broke out in this background. As we see some of the tribal rebellions had millenarian overtones and

revealed the passionate longing of the tribal peasants for another and better world. They remained devoted to the leaders who invariably came from the same community and predicted the advent of a new social order<sup>10</sup>. They often rose in violent struggles, the oppression of non-tribal landlords and money lenders continued unabated. The agitation soon assumed the proportions of a rebellion driving the surprised Europeans into panic, and they sought the Government's intervention, which was not forthcoming readily, in view of the violent Santal revolt of 1855-56 and the Indian war of independence of 1857, which left unforgettable impressions on the foreigner as well as on the sons of the soil. The land settlements of the East India Company were motivated with a commercial basis, namely of squeezing as much revenue from the peasants as one could secure, irrespective of his ability to pay the enhanced assessments fixed at an exaggerated estimate of the yield of the soil. This, the ryots, could not pay, not only that, the required payment was directed to be paid in cash which again affected him adversely owing to fluctuating prices. The convenience of the Government was evidently not the same as the facility of the subject. This new method of collecting land revenue was at variance with that of the traditional Moghul rulers and drove the cultivators into the greedy hands of money lenders, whose rates of usury ranged between fifty and hundred percent. Indebtedness resulted in suits for taking possession of the peasants' land, through the law courts, whose decisions were taken far away from the villages of the ryots and in utter ignorance and disregard of the conditions prevailing, involving costs which the poor peasant could not afford to incur. Between 1851 and 1865 the number of the discontent prevailed, rose seven to eight and half times. Even the company's Governor-in-Council was obliged to acknowledge that our civil courts have become hateful to the masses of our Indian

subjects from being made the instruments of almost incredible rapacity of usurious capitalists, yet another revolt that rocked South India that of the combustible Mopla Muslims who were descendants of both early Arab settlers as well as converted Hindus. The struggle here was against the zaminders Namudiris by the peasants tenants, the cause being the conversion by the British Indian Government of the status of a Jenmi from that of the traditional partner to that of an absolute owner of the land, with right to evict the Mopla tenants, a right he had not before. This resulted in the enhancement of rents and wholesale evictions for non-payment of rents.

The Moplas revolted under the able leadership of a young lawyer Shri Narayana Menon and struck against the land holders. Between 1836 and 1854 there were twenty two uprisings resulting in pitched battles in which several Moplas lost their lives at the hands of the security forces. There were riots in 1851, and 1852, 1855, when thousands of rebels who were guilty of arson, and Murder of land holders and their supporters were arrested and hundreds executed by the British authorities. Shri Narayana Menon who entered the Coimbatore Jail at the age of 30 for leading the peasant revolt secured his release only when he served a long term of more than twenty years for a life sentence. It is thus seen that in each one of the revolts, tribal or non-tribal, the parties to the disputes were originally the tenant and the land grabber and as revolt and violence flared up by masses. The Government invariably stepped into safeguard the vested interests of money lenders, zaminders, and the intelligentsia. Undoubtedly revolt was not only in the air but got into the blood of every one's veins in the mid-nineteenth century period of India's chequered history. There is, therefore, no point in trying to find out who ignited the first spark, the tribal or the non-tribal surely the Santal revolt of 1855 should have taught a

few lessons to the leaders of the National Revolt of 1857, and this must have been of immense help in estimating the seriousness of events that happened subsequent to it. Social Movements was prevalent in India during and since British rule. We may define a Social Movement as ‘the attempt of a group to effect change in the face of resistance’<sup>11</sup>; and the peasants as people who engaged in agricultural or related production with primitive (palaeotechnic) means and who surrender part of their produce or its equivalent to landlords or to agents of the state. Peasant revolts have in fact been common both during and since the British period, every state of present day India having experienced several revolts over the past two hundred years. The revolt that is ‘Indian Mutiny’ of 1857-58 was one significant revolt in which vast bodies of peasants fought or otherwise worked to destroy British rule over an area of more than 500,000 square mile.<sup>12</sup> The frequency of these revolts were deeply influenced the body and mind of the masses. On balance, India was plundered through the export of capital to Britain by such methods as the repatriation of profits and salaries, debt services for colonial wars and public works, ‘home charges’ and adverse terms of trade with respect to raw materials exported from India and to imported manufactured goods. In many regions various means were used to encourage or compel cultivators to grow industrial crops and even food crops, for export. In addition to highland plantations for tea, coffee, cinnamon, and later rubber, large areas of the plains were at different periods turned over to indigo opium, cotton, oil seeds, jute, pepper, coconuts and other export crops.<sup>13</sup>

Speculation and investment in land by merchants, bureaucrats, landlords, and successful cash crop farmers made land sales increasingly common. The growth of absentee landlordism and of cultivation for Private Profit meant that traditional

paternalistic relations of landlords and their tenants were disrupted in many villages, and that tenants and labourers were exposed to new and more alienating forms of exploitation, resulting in greater resentment on their part. From the 1850s with the building of railways, the increased movement of goods and people had profound effects. It further undermined the unity and self-sufficiency of villages. The modern transport of food grains reduced the danger of severe regional famines; at the same time by permitting grain stocks to be removed from prosperous areas it appears to have allowed the growth of chronic malnutrition throughout the country. Concomitantly, however, modern transport fostered the movement of ideas between town and country and created links between urban and rural people. Such links strengthened the Indian nationalist movement led by the bourgeoisie; they also permitted a degree of unity between peasants and urban workers in the then revolts.

Between 1765 and 1857 a large proportion of revolts were led by Hindu and Muslims petty rulers, former revenue agents under the Mughals, tribal chiefs in hill regions and local landed military officers (poligars) in south India. They were supported by masses of peasants, common people and sometimes former soldiers. The revolts were either against the conquest itself and the imposition of heavy revenues on existing nobles, or retaliatory attempts to drive out the British after they had dispossessed a zaminder or a raja for failing to pay the revenue and had replaced him with some other claimant to the estate, with a company officer, or with a merchant, money lender or adventurer who had bought the estate at auction. The goals of these revolts were complete annihilation or expulsion of the British and reversion to the previous government and agrarian relations. The peasants were not blind loyalists. Their own grievances were bitter, for in their



efforts to squeeze out the revenue the company's officers often completely pauperized the peasants or had them starved, flogged or jailed.<sup>14</sup> The largest restorative rebellions was of course, the 'Mutiny' of 1857-58. Began by Hindu and Muslim soldiers in revolt against their condition and against offence to their religions, it engaged millions of impoverished peasants, ruined artisans, dispossessed nobles, estate managers, tribal chiefs, landlords, religious leaders (Hindu, Muslim, tribal and Sikh), Civil servants, boatmen, shop-keepers, mendicants, low caste laborers and workers in European plantations and factories. In the heart of the rebel area mass insurrections of armed peasants, in addition to the Mutinying troops and the private armies of rulers, combined to massacre the British and to destroy government buildings, revenue and court records, coffee and indigo plantations and factories, telegraphs, railways and churches – in short, every organ of British rule. The war was a holy war, so announced repeatedly by rulers and religious leaders, but it was also most interestingly a war in which Hindu and Muslim, tribesmen and Sikh, explicitly foreswore mutual enmity and combined in defense of their own and each other's customs and honor against infidel conquest and oppression. Contrary to standard British accounts, it seems to have come within an ace of ending the company's rule.<sup>15</sup> For several months it raged over a 500,000 square mile region in which the peasantry, including the lower castes and the landless laborers, formed the backbone of resistance.

Indian peasants have a long tradition of armed uprisings, reaching back at least to the initial British conquest and the last decades of Mughal Government. For more than 200 years peasants in all the major regions have repeatedly risen against landlords, revenue agents and other bureaucrats, money lenders, police and military forces. The

uprisings were responses to relative deprivation of usually severe character, always economic, and often also involving physical brutality or ethnic persecution. Major uprisings during the British rule more successful have involved mass insurrections, initially against specific grievances, and the less successful, social banditry and terrorist vengeance. Both in the case of communist revolts and in that of earlier peasant uprisings, social banditry and terrorist vengeance, when they occurred, appear to have happened in the wake of repression of other forms of revolt. Although revolts have been widespread, certain areas have an especially strong tradition of rebellion. Bengal has been a hot bed of revolt, both rural and urban from the earliest days of British rule some districts in particular such as Mymensingh, Dinajpure, Rangpur and Pubna in Bangladesh, and the Santal region of Bihar and West Bengal, figured repeatedly in peasant struggles and continue to do so. The tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh, and the state of Kerala, also have long traditions of revolt. Hill regions where tribal or other minorities retain a certain independence, ethnic unity, and tactical maneuverability, and where the terrain is suited to guerilla warfare, are of course especially favourable for peasant struggles, but these have also occurred in densely populated plains regions such as Thanjavur, where rack-renting, land hunger, landless labour and unemployment cause great suffering. During colonial period in India, the increasing poverty, famine and unemployment make it seem certain that India's agrarian ills can be solved only by a peasant-backed revolution leading to socialism, but the struggle will be very long and hard.

Revolution is used even to describe political upheaval which changes personnel of the Government; (the term would deprive the concept of its essential characteristics). Marxism has provided a very fruitful definition of revolution by change in properly

relations, and transfer of power from one class to another. In this context it has given a clue towards defining revolution, which in recent times has taken two forms, viz. bourgeois-democratic revolutions and socialist revolutions. Marxism has also pointed out that in the context of colonial and semi-colonial countries, bourgeois's revolution or colonial revolution meant national liberation struggles from foreign rule, establishment of a bourgeois regime to launch an Independent bourgeois socio-economic order, sometimes described as completing the task of the bourgeois democratic revolution. The concept of socialist or proletarian revolution is made clear by defining it as a revolution, wherein bourgeois property relations are over turned and political power is transferred from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat. During the imperialist phase of capitalism and particularly after the Great Socialist October Revolution in a backward, predominantly peasant country, an acute controversy has been going on about the nature of Revolution which would complete even the bourgeois-democratic tasks can the bourgeoisie initiate development which can lift the economy and social order from colonial underdevelopment to even a bourgeois type of development experienced by advanced capitalist countries, or has the revolution to be a socialist one, even in order to complete bourgeois democratic task, whatever the discussions and differences among Marxist, the major criterion adopted by them to define revolution still appears the most scientific and fruitful one. It helps us to locate the role of different sections of rural population in a struggle for bringing about a revolutionary transformation of society. The fear that the masses of the Third World may overthrow even the indigenous bourgeois – landlord classes in the process of overthrowing imperialism, and thereby usher in a socialist Revolution has led the national bourgeois and the bourgeois intelligentsia to evolve a

comprising “transfer of power” from colonialism to independence. This path of compromise is generally characterized by bargaining and negotiating with imperialism backed by various kind of reformist pressure struggles, wherein the exploited and oppressed classes and masses are often pressed in the service of ‘nationalism’ to build up pressure, but not permitted to take to the road of radical and revolutionary class and militant mass struggles against the common exploiter. The concept of revolution needs clarification, because when a panegyric assessment of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry is projected.

The role of peasantry is carried on with regard to anti-colonial, anti-imperialist national movement. Various sections of the rural people are pressed in the movement, without being permitted to take to class struggles against common exploiter or it refers to the role of peasantry in the context of a nationalist movement wherein the leadership adopts the path of militant class and mass struggles, based on the exploited and oppressed rural strata developing their own strength and fighting power, in and in the process sharpening class struggles against common exploiter and oppressors. From time to time, throughout the centuries, the peasant has indeed risen in rebellion against his oppressors. But history is also replete with examples of peasants who have borne silently, and for long periods, extremes of exploitation and oppression. At the same time occasional outbreaks of peasant revolt do raise the question of the conditions in which the peasant becomes revolutionary. We cannot speak of the peasantry in this context as a homogeneous and undifferentiated mass. Its different sections have different aim and a social perspective for each of them is confronted with a different set of problems. But one thing common amongst all peasants and masses was they fought against one common

exploiter (East India Company). The constellation of peasant forces that participate in a revolutionary movement depends upon the character of the revolution, or, as Marxists would see it, the 'historical stage' which it represent. Thus, when a revolutionary movement progresses from 'bourgeois-democratic revolution' to 'socialist revolution', the roles of the different sections of the peasantry no longer remain the same.<sup>16</sup> Equally question begging are those generalizations which dismiss the peasantry as a backward, servile, and reactionary class, incapable of joining hands with forces of social revolution. The peasants have in fact played a role, sometimes a crucial and decisive role, in revolutions. The Chinese Revolution is a case in point. The question that needs to be asked, therefore, is not whether the peasants are or are not revolutionary but, rather, under what circumstances they become revolutionary or what roles different sections of the peasantry play in revolutionary situations. These are question which greatly interest socialist movements in countries with predominantly peasant populations. For socialists, moreover, the question is not merely that of mobilizing peasant support as a means to achieve success in their struggle. The question is not just that of utilizing the forces of the peasantry. The free and active participation of the peasantry in transforming their mode of existence and giving shape to the new society must be an essential part of the socialist goal itself,<sup>17</sup> we propose in this essay to consider the roles played by different sections of the peasantry in the cases of Russia, China and India. We can easily examine the preconditions that seem necessary to bring about a revolutionary mobilization of the peasantry in the struggle for socialism, whether it is peaceful and constitutional or insurrectionary. We shall put forward hypothesis which, in our view, throw fresh light on certain aspects of the problems. These hypotheses require further consideration,

especially in the light of the experiences of other countries.<sup>18</sup> We would like to emphasize at the outset that these propositions are being advanced tentatively and in order to open up a discussion on certain aspects of the problem that have so far been obscured.<sup>19</sup> The respective roles of the so-called middle peasants and poor peasants and the pre-conditions that we find are necessary for a revolutionary mobilization of poor peasants. These terms have been defined in Marxist literature to refer to various classes of the peasantry. But they are fraught with ambiguity and, as we shall see later, they have sometimes been reinterpreted to alter their denotation to suit ideological exigencies of political tactics or the personal pre-directions of particular writers.<sup>20</sup> This terminology appears to focus attention on relative differences in the wealth or poverty of various strata of the peasantry without any dedication of the criteria by which the strata may be distinguished from each other as classes. Stratification on the basis of simple difference in wealth, on a single linear scale, is often the basis of differentiation of 'classes' in academic sociology. But that is not the basis on which Marxists distinguish classes. The Marxist concept of class is a structural concept, classes are defined by relations of production, where several modes of production coexist, and classes cannot be arranged in a single linear hierarchical order because they must be structurally differentiated. The division of the peasantry into rich peasants, middle peasants, and poor peasants suggests an array of the peasantry with the different strata arranged one over the other, in a single order. The movement of peasantry for free exploited society symbolized the national response of the Indian people, (the masses) to the British imperial rule. India was always a nation and the cultural diversity which characterized its social organization was a part of the Indian unity. Throughout the ages, however, the Indian political culture remained un-integrated. Indian renaissance

provided the basic groundwork of Indian nationalism but its impact was unevenly distributed over the length and breadth of the country during the mid of nineteenth century. It accepted the Indian belief systems as the main frame of reference of national consciousness. The national movement or the peasant struggles in India began as a protest against British colonialism which was informed by the ideology of liberalist reform. The Indian renaissance gave the movement a new thrust and rapidly evolved it into a mass struggle which underlined the repudiation of the British rule. The Indian resurgence brought home to the British the inherent danger in the integration of the Indian political culture which they had assiduously carried out to consolidate their power in India. In the context of the Indian freedom, the integration of the Indian political culture assumed new ideological dimensions, which portended the repudiation of the empire as well as its liberalist reforms. In the beginning the British had turned to Hindus, an overwhelming majority of the Indian population to formulate a basis for the integration of India into a political unity.

British rule in India was based on economic exploitation of the indigenous people who were gradually becoming conscious about it at all India level. They had very well realized how their large scale and small scale industries were purposely destroyed by the imperialist rulers so that they might ultimately be forced to import from Lancashire and other places in England in order to make their daily needs meet. The preferential trade relations between England and India also did much to awaken the consciousness of national interest in India circles. The tendency of the administration of the British East India Company was to encourage unrestrained exploitation of the country and its people by British traders in India who ran the new government especially for their own personal

aggrandizement and the profit of their employers in their homeland. Without stopping this exploitation, Indians had realized that although the trustee-idea did in those days seek to apply a moral brake to the process, but with the birth of British industrialism, following upon the discovery of steam power and the invention of machineries, and increasing body of political and economic interests was created in England in the administration and exploitation of India. Since then administration and exploitation had gone in the hand of the government of this great dependency. With a growth of this new condition, all the old moral values had been entirely destroyed. The apologists of the British rule in India had sought to justify this apparent economic injustice to their own enlightened conscience by the fancy of the trust idea, forgetting obvious fact that no law or court of justice in civilization permits or tolerates the appointment of any person to the charge of a minor's estate who has obviously adverse interests in that estate. For, it could not be denied that the British and Indian interests had never been identical in the prevailing system. Indians' political and administrative incapacity might be put forward in justification of the administrative domination of the British people over Indians. The adverse British interests in the economic and industrial life of India, which they proved, still existed and their presence completely established the unfairness of the plea of trusteeship, upon which Great Britain still sought to satisfy her conscience and the civilized world in regard to her enjoyment of autocratic authority in the government of India.<sup>21</sup>

In social sphere too, the age of renaissance and modernization had set in with the advent of Raja Rammohun Roy on the social and cultural horizon of Bengal in particular and that of India in general. Until the emergence of Rabindranath Tagore there was no



comparable figure of great stature produced by India whose life work could be considered as having the same immediacy of influence in the maturing of modern age in the socio-cultural sphere of India.<sup>22</sup> The crystal palace exhibition (1851) was followed by a number of such exhibitions which demonstrated the ever growing and expanding power of British imperialism. At the time of British imperialism, they fearlessly took all sorts of steps intensifying the exploitation of the Indians to the benefit of the British monopoly capitalists.<sup>23</sup> “It was an era of shameless infiltration by British capital, the effects of which”, writes a Soviet Scholar in a recent study, “were felt in one way or another by almost all classes and strata of Indians society”.<sup>24</sup> The economic exploitation of India led to the leveling of severe criticism and touching, sensitive, emotional lamentation by the politically conscious Indian elements. They alleged that their long standing self sufficient economics were undermined and dissolved. The aim of production changed from self sufficiency and direct consumption to the market and profit and there was left very little scope for free and full development of Indian economy.<sup>25</sup> It was transformed into a dependent complementary Shri Aurobindo alleged: India... is an asset in the hands of injustice throughout the world. Capitalists from every part of the globe flock to India and are provided with every facility to exploit her in the interest of the Plutocracy of the world ... so long as this country ... remains the dumping ground for all sorts of foreign goods, so long as the children of the soil are not granted that preferential treatment which is only their right, unscrupulous wealth will continue to have an advantage which will considerably handicap the friends of labour in their efforts to bring competence to every man. If accumulation of wealth in few hands is a curse against which an enlightened section of humanity has at last set its face, then they should complete their propaganda by

seeking to step a fertile source of this evil as foreign over lordship.<sup>26</sup> Besides, the commercial bourgeoisie who constituted a numerous and significant nucleus in the urban centres was very much antagonized. There was not the slightest disagreement of theirs with the popularly prevailing anti-imperialist feeling that the colonialists had deprived them of a large portion of their commercial profits and obstructed indigenous industrial development, which in turn kept them at a distance from accumulating their depleted profits from trade. It should also not be forgotten that speedily growing colonial exploitation of India also paved the way for the worsening of the economic status of a large number of commercial bourgeoisie and middle men, and above all, of course, those of small position. The existing fulcrum of commerce was gravely threatened not only by the newly developing means of transport controlled by a foreign administrative apparatus, but also by the speedy penetration of large primarily alien commercial houses engage in importing and exporting transaction. Due to the introduction of the new economic system there took place an extensive stratification of the agrarian population. While on the one hand, the agrarian society comprised feudal or semi-feudal landlords, absentee landlords and rich farmers whose strength was not much numerically, on the other hand, there were poor peasants, tenants, semi-serfs and labourers whose number increased by leaps and bounds with the stabilization of the new economic system.<sup>27</sup> The rising social contradiction of labour and the ascendancy of the power of money and the market were bound to culminate in disastrous consequences on the peasantry. Not only did rents greatly increase but a large number of peasants lost the land they had once owned. The bad economic conditions were very congenial to the growth of great mass discontent in the poor agrarian population. It provided a social basis for the building up and organizing

of a powerful peasant's movements and mass mobilization all over the country. Gradually this movement became an integral part of the overall nationalist movement engaged in liberation of the country from British domination. The mass of the peasants joined the nationalist movement because they considered the alien regime the ally of the feudal lords and money lenders who exploited them.<sup>28</sup> In this way they were affected by the bad economic condition which created among masses a mentality to fight against the British East India Company and destroy the common exploitation in all sector.

During 1850's peasant and as well as exploited masses demanded the abolition of the common exploitation which had done by zaminders, money lenders who were appointed by British authority. The peasant workers as well as all tribal community played a vital role in the process of the struggle for socialism. The masses including the laboures, peasants, artisans (who were affected by de-industrialization) demanding their rights, minimally cultural rights, maximally political right, always more economic equality. The rural working population expressed their grievances, demanding to retain the fruits of their labour, which often was expressed by a demand to own the land they toiled. The socialist trends were to be found among the masses. The structures of socialist trend as well as socialist movement began whose political base was in the masses exploited by the British East India Company, which later extended their bases of support by appealing to the ant-capitalist sentiments of the broad masses of the population. The extension and deepening over time of the capitalist process within the capitalist world economy had extended and deepened the polarization of classes on a world scale, and thereby strengthened the social base of anti-systemic movements.<sup>29</sup> It is a question of which movement has been in fact able to mobilize politically the popular masses for a

struggle against those who were continuously exploiting the masses, which has found significant resource, for demands that it represents the popular interest. Furthermore, not only did these three varieties of movements favoured by in mobilizing popular support of peasants, tribal as well as common men, the peasants also fought with courage against exploitation. Irrespective of the issues which provoked the struggles initially, they became struggles against feudalism and imperialism. However, these spontaneous, militant upsurges lacked direction and organization, and in many cases, remained localized or bound within a given community. In the end, they could not match the might of the colonial state despite their courage. Yet it should not be forgotten that many of the struggles won important demands. For example we can say that Santal Revolt was a step against common exploitation. Many such struggles were spontaneous in character and were fought locally. In several cases, these began with limited immediate demands, but soon transformed into battles against landlordism and British authority. There were numerous uprisings of tribal during first half of the nineteenth century. British rule ushered in commercialization of agriculture, and this led to the penetration of tribal areas by outsiders, money lenders, traders, land-grabbers and contractors, the dikus, so hated by the Santal. Some of the major tribal revolts of the period include the revolts of the Bhils in 1818-31, of Kolis in 1824 in Bombay presidency, of Mewars in 1820 in Rajputana, of the Ho tribe in Chhotanagpur in 1813-32, of the Cutchingis in 1815 and 1832. In 1846 the Khond rose up in Orissa and 1856 witnessed the Santal revolt. These revolts fed into the rising anti-colonial sentiments of the people.<sup>30</sup> In India social mobilization of peasants for agrarian reform was also an integral part of the nationalist liberation movements from the beginning during 1850s. Thus in most of India social

mobilization was not spontaneous, but a gradual approach of popular participation via common exploitation system. In the above case study one could say that exploitation by British East India Company had caused peasants to take the risk of mobilizing or gathering within one revolt's lap to fight against the British East India Company, money lenders, zaminders etc.

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27. It may be recalled that the new economic system did not provide much security to the working class also. Following the traditional bourgeois pattern of extracting absolute surplus value the propertied classes – both foreign and Indian – primarily concentrated on the exploitation of the proletariat. Accordingly, the inauguration of the twentieth century



saw the working day reach the greatest length of time in the history of factories. The workers were compelled to “toil from dawn to dark and sometimes even longer”. How mercilessly they were exploited can be gauged from the length of the working day in various industries [For further study see. Levkovsky, A. I, n.1, pp.332-34 and 338].

28. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p.30.

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