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*Agrarian Issues, Peasant Movements, and the Congress Politics in  
Bihar, 1929-1950*

**Jitendra Kumar**

Doctoral Scholar, Centre for Historical Studies,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi



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**Abstract:**

*This paper traces down the nature of peasant movements in colonial Bihar led by the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. It highlights the strife that evolved the Kisan Sabha in Bihar, and pursues its journey as to what extent it stood for peasants and agricultural labourers. Apart from it, this paper covers how the Kisan Sabha involved itself with different political entities of the time to struggle for the prosperity of the people living in the countryside.*

**Keywords:** Bihar Kisan Sabha, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Peasant Movements, Congress, Colonial Bihar, Agrarian Issues, Bakasht Satyagraha

**Introduction**

Historical works on peasant movements display several instances of peasant rebellion in colonial India such as the Chota Nagpur Uprisings of 1801 and 1817, Barasat Revolt of 1831, Santhal rebellion (1855-56), Indigo riots (1859 and 1907), and Munda uprising (1899-1901).<sup>1</sup> In Bengal, the Indigo Revolt of 1859 primarily broke out against the European indigo planters; it also protested against the increasing land revenue continuously by indigenous landlords.<sup>2</sup> In 1875, Deccan Riots exposed ‘a reflection of tension generated within rural society’ due to the legal and administrative reforms introduced by the British.<sup>3</sup> However, it was the Champaran Satyagraha (1917) which revealed that there was a space for a systematic way of peasant movements in India.

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Champaran Satyagraha raised the question of indigo plantation and pressurised the British government and European planters to end a teen-kathia system.<sup>4</sup> Yet, this satyagraha was limited to ‘an attempt by the rich peasantry to remove those hurdles in the way of the profitable cultivation of food grains and sugar cane which had been placed by the deposition of the English planters’.<sup>5</sup> However, this could not break the exploitative power of the rulers. In the early 1920s, Bihar also recorded peasant movements led by Swami Vidyanand, Babu Sheonandan Singh and Deoki Nandan Sinha.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the organised form of peasant movements only began with the establishment of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (hereafter the Kisan Sabha or BPKS)<sup>7</sup> in 1929 under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (hereafter Sahajanand). The Kisan Sabha later created an atmosphere that put pressure on the Congress ministry<sup>8</sup> to abolish zamindari system and take land reform initiatives to eradicate rural poverty, and to diminish social and economic disparities.

Some historians have argued that ‘the whole history of peasant movement has been strongly nationalist in outlook’ and both the Congress and peasant leaders have ‘frequently worked together’.<sup>9</sup> Vinita Damodaran claimed that Kisan Sabha in Bihar was ‘moderate’ in nature which limited its aggression only to big landlords and did not come up with any radically socio-economic programme distinct from the Congress,<sup>10</sup> whereas Walter Hauser saw it basically as ‘a movement of agrarian agitation’ and not as ‘a neatly structured and functioning organisational unit’,<sup>11</sup> whose leadership ‘was characterised by the changing attitudes of Swami Sahajanand towards the agrarian problems and political circumstances of the 1930s’.<sup>12</sup> However, Sahajanand believed that if the Kisan Sabha stood to be ‘merely a part of the Congress or its only department, then it could neither organise an independent movement nor create such an enormous atmosphere which would establish the pressure on the Congress to make it progressive’.<sup>13</sup> He considered it as the best institution representing peasants because it was only the Kisan Sabha which rendered services and represented the most backward people in the countryside.<sup>14</sup> For him, the Kisan Sabha, as an organisation, perceived politics through the lens of economics, while others view economics from the lens of politics.<sup>15</sup> Sahajanand viewed it as a fort of the peasants, representing and safeguarding their unity and interests. He believed that if peasants and labourers continued to be united then the Kisan-Mazdoor Raj would surely be established one day.<sup>16</sup>

## **Agrarian Issues, Peasant Movements, and the Congress Politics in Bihar, 1929-1950**

This article consists of six sections based on the nature of peasant movements in colonial Bihar led by the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha. Section One traces a brief analysis of agrarian problems faced by peasants and agricultural labourers (hereafter labourers) in colonial Bihar, while the consequences to the formation of the BPKS are outlined in Section Two. Section Three deals with the political relationship of the Kisan Sabha with the Congress over agrarian issues. The various forms of struggles overtime over *bakasht* land are explained in Section Four, whereas Section Five narrates the dilemma of internal conflicts within the Kisan Sabha—while some peasants/leaders supported the war because they wanted the fascist forces to be defeated while a few opposed the war in national interest—The course of zamindari abolition is addressed in Section Sixth, which is followed by the conclusion which attempts to illustrate to what extent the Kisan Sabha succeeded in resolving the agrarian issues of colonial Bihar.

### **Agrarian Issues in Colonial Bihar**

The condition of peasants and labourers was very pathetic in colonial Bihar. They had to pay substantial taxes and several kinds of arrears to landlords. For example, they gave *begar* service at the landlord's house, and they were not even entitled to use crops without landlords' approval if the landlord's men put 'cow-dung', a symbolic warning, on crops.<sup>17</sup> Peasants were also ousted from their tenancy if landlords raised themselves to cultivate land or gave land to another peasant. Moreover, the Ramgarh Raj (zamindari) took millions of acres of *jirat*, *bakasht* and *gair-majarua* land to establish a private company and himself became a Managing Director.<sup>18</sup> Besides, peasants and labourers were dominated, exploited, and harassed by landlords in various ways. The landlords of Zora, for instance, had diverted sources of water from agricultural fields thus rendering damage to crops.<sup>19</sup> Peasants' cattle were beaten and not allowed to graze on their forest land by The Ramgarh Raj. They were also prevented from picking up *mahua* from the forest.<sup>20</sup> In the Ranka Raj, peasants were forced to supply ghee, curd, milk, goats, and rice on various occasions free of cost. They had to supply one calf for every 20 cows, and one seer of ghee for every buffalo. They were also not allowed to use forest fuels.<sup>21</sup>

Similar types of exploitation were seen in the Monghyr Raj where Raja Sir Raghunandan Prasad Singh collected taxes even if the land was under water due to flooding. Peasant assets were confiscated upon their failure to pay rent on time.<sup>22</sup> At Simri under Dumraon's

## Jitendra Kumar

zamindari, peasants were 'made to pay even when they could produce nothing... [and] no remission was granted for their lands getting covered with river sands and becoming unfit for cultivation'.<sup>23</sup> There was also a substantial gap in the pattern of landholdings among landlords and peasants. The Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee noted that landlords had 70 per cent of batai land and 28 per cent of danabandi landholdings. Moreover, they had 85 per cent share and 63 per cent share of the total production respectively. At the time of Permanent Settlement, the landlord's share was one-tenth of total revenue collection, but their income augmented over time through illegal exactions. Several illegal exactions were reported at Purnea against Banaili Raj, Babu Raj Behari Das, Raja P.C. Lall and Moulvi Iqbal Hassqin.<sup>24</sup> A case of exploitation was also unveiled from Supaul where peasants had to pay Rs. 30-60 to Tehsildars, Rs. 15 to Amin, Rs. 4-10 to Patwari, Rs. 3 to Naik, and Rs. 4 to a peon, at the time when they sold their land. Apart from this, in *dakhil-kharij*, the Patwari charged Rs. 2 and Amlas Rs. 14 per *bigha* for issuing documents.<sup>25</sup>

The proportion of the population reliant on agriculture increased to 73 per cent in 1921 from 61 per cent in 1891,<sup>26</sup> and then to 87.3 per cent in 1951 from 78.8 per cent in 1931.<sup>27</sup> As per the Census Report of 1911, the number of landlords in India was 2.8 million which increased to 4.1 million in 1931, while the number of peasants possessing land decreased from 74.6 million in 1921 to 65.5 million in 1931.<sup>28</sup> The condition of the labourers was pitiable. Their numbers increased from 21.5 million in 1921 to 31.5 million in 1931 out of which 23 million were recorded as landless labourers.<sup>29</sup> Peasants' income reduced over time. The selling value of several agricultural products remained the same from 1928 to 1936, while the purchasing cost of market products soared day by day.<sup>30</sup> Due to fall in prices, especially during the Great Depression, peasants could not pay rent to landlords which provided the opportunity for landlords to convert tenancy land into *bakasht* land.

Debt and its interest also posed major problems for peasants and labourers. By 1921, Purnia district had a deficit of about Rs. 95,000, while Saran, Muzaffarpur, and Champaran had Rs. five lakhs, five lakhs, and seven lakhs, respectively.<sup>31</sup> Debt and the 'vicious cycle' of interest proved to be 'one of the sharpest measures of the growth of the agrarian crises' in colonial Bihar.<sup>32</sup> Instead of improving peasant's condition, the government raised taxes from Rs. 16 to 18, which costs Indian peasants a deficit of Rs. 40 crores every year.<sup>33</sup>

### **Formation of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha**

Although the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was established in November 1929 at Sonapur, the idea of its formation came into existence in 1927 when Sahajanand visited Bihta, situated in western Patna. He saw oppressive systems where landlords were exploiting peasants and labourers. Following this, he began organising peasants to fight for their rights, which led to the formation of West Patna Kisan Sabha on March 4, 1928.<sup>34</sup> In 1929, a few left-leaning Congress leaders such as Ram Dayalu Singh, Krishna Singh, Baldev Singh, Pandit Yamuna Karjee, Guru Sahay Lal and Kailash Bihari Lal met at Muzaffarpur to discuss agrarian problems. They opposed a proposed amendment in the Tenancy Act of 1885. The idea of a peasant organisation that could raise peasant's issues and represent them in the government's council came to their minds. Soon after, the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was founded, and Sahajanand was made its first president.<sup>35</sup> However, the Kisan Sabha put a hold on its activities when the civil disobedience movement began in 1930.<sup>36</sup>

The formation of the Kisan Sabha was questioned by Congress leaders Rambriksha Benipuri and Braj Kishore Prasad as it was perceived to be a threat to the Congress, which was crucial for the fight against the British.<sup>37</sup> Initially, Sardar Patel welcomed the Kisan Sabha while announcing that the zamindari system was not required to exist anywhere in India. However, later he opposed the Kisan Sabha.<sup>38</sup> It was further regarded as a danger to the position of the Congress and was blamed by the Zamindar Sabha of Muzaffarpur for 'inciting violence and creating an anarchic situation'.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the United Party, funded by the landlords, decided to establish a bogus Kisan Sabha in which Ambika Kant Sinha, Deoki Prasad Sinha, Soma Singh and Guru Sahay Lal were to be the office-bearers, and Sachchidanand Sinha and Radhika Raman Prasad Singh were to be its founding members.<sup>40</sup> It was only on the request and pursuance of Sahajanand, Jugal Kishore Singh, and Yadunandan Sharma that the idea to form the new Kisan Sabha was abandoned,<sup>41</sup> and the old Kisan Sabha was revived in March 1933 in which many Congressmen became members.<sup>42</sup>

For discussing various agrarian issues, the Kisan Sabha held its first conference at Bihta in 1933, presided by Sahajanand, in which many leaders belonging to different parties participated.<sup>43</sup> Some leaders spoke on zamindari abolition, but Sahajanand opposed it then. After this conference, there were widespread protests in Gaya district, and August 15 was

## Jitendra Kumar

fixed for a rally in which lakhs of peasants participated. However, no such outcome happened due to the imposition of Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code; nevertheless, the Kisan Sabha became famous, and peasants' issues touched everyone's heart.<sup>44</sup> The Kisan Sabha organised its second conference at Gaya in 1934, presided by Purushottam Das Tandon, where the resolution on zamindari abolition was again proposed. Tandon supported zamindari abolition with compensation to be given to landlords, but Sahajanand did not accept the idea of compensation for landlords.<sup>45</sup> Although, Sahajanand supported zamindari abolition resolution in the third conference held at Hajipur in 1935.<sup>46</sup> Between 1933 and 1935, the Kisan Sabha organised over 500 meetings to discuss the various strategies of their movement.<sup>47</sup>

Over this period, the Kisan Sabha adopted its constitution and prepared manifestos to present the methods and aims of the movement. It included all peasants whose primary source of income was cultivation, including petty landlords and agricultural labourers.<sup>48</sup> The Kisan Sabha identified the nature of land tenures, oppressive rent, credit system, and exploitation of landlords and the British officials as the leading cause of peasants' destitution. Therefore, it demanded the abolition of the zamindari system, waiving of debts and a standardised credit system.<sup>49</sup> The Kisan Sabha established its unit at village, *thana* and district level to maintain the proper functioning of the Sabha. To draw more peasants and labourers, it reduced its membership from 2 annas (Rs. 0.12) to 1 pice (Rs. 0.015) in 1936. In 1935, its membership was 80,000, which increased to 2,50,000 by 1938.<sup>50</sup> The activities of the Kisan Sabha put pressure on the government to withdraw the Amendment in the Tenancy Bill that was introduced in 1935.<sup>51</sup>

By 1934, Socialist leaders such as Jayaprakash Narayan, Abdul Bari, Shyam Nandan Sinha, Ramakrishna Benipuri, and Kishore Prasanna Sinha had joined the Kisan Sabha.<sup>52</sup> Jayaprakash even criticised the Congress on its policies while urging it to focus on organising peasants and workers to improve their economic condition.<sup>53</sup> Since the Congress did not represent peasants' interest, as evident by its refusal to take an anti-landlord and anti-capitalist stand, the peasant leaders proposed the establishment of a separate organisation for peasants at the all India level. However, Rajendra Prasad, who was the President of BPCC (Bihar Provincial Congress Committee) opposed this idea of forming a separate organisation of peasants at the national level and further implored the Congress not to give any opportunity to an independent organisation like the Kisan Sabha.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) was established in 1936, and its first conference was organised under



## **Agrarian Issues, Peasant Movements, and the Congress Politics in Bihar, 1929-1950**

the chairmanship of Sahajanand at Lucknow, the same place where the All India Congress Committee (AICC) held its session. This conference discussed the issues of zamindari abolition and ownership of land to cultivators. It also fixed September 1 as the All India Kisan Day.<sup>55</sup> The same year, the AIKS organised its second conference at Faizpur, presided over by N.G. Ranga. The AICC's session was also held at the same place separately.

### **Kisan Sabha and Congress Politics**

By 1936, the Congress desired to establish close contact with the masses, especially peasants and labourers. It asked peasants to 'actively associate themselves as a class with the Congress and its organisations'.<sup>56</sup> The Congress leaders argued that 'the real problem is not merely to make contacts with the masses, but to organise and lead the masses'—sections of industrial workers, peasants, lower middle class, students, and women.<sup>57</sup> Once the peasantry became the 'backbone of the national movement', the Congress expected the Kisan Sabha to serve and support the Congress for whom national unity and independence from British imperialism were the foremost goals.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, the socialist leaders of the Kisan Sabha wanted to transform the Congress into a socialist organisation putting its right-wing leaders aside.<sup>59</sup> However, there broke out a conflict between the Congress and the Kisan Sabha when Sahajanand was not included in the Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee, constituted on Jawaharlal Nehru's recommendation, to enquire into the agrarian crises in Bihar. The enquiry committee prepared the report and submitted it to the AICC, but Sahajanand was not asked for suggestions, nor was the report shown to him.<sup>60</sup> This committee, as Jawaid Alam argued, 'did not make any real enquiry, rather it held political meetings aimed at distancing kisans from the Kisan Sabha'.<sup>61</sup>

The Assembly Election of 1937 was a dramatic event in the history of the Kisan Sabha and the peasant movements in Bihar. The Kisan Sabha urged Congress to choose only those candidates who 'stood for the peasantry' and 'unreservedly support its demands'.<sup>62</sup> The Sabha suggested the names of Yamuna Karjee and Dhanraj Sharma in Darbhanga, but only Karjee was given ticket from Darbhanga.<sup>63</sup> There also arose conflict for the Hajipur seat from which the Sabha wanted Kishore Prasanna Sinha to contest.<sup>64</sup> In view of most of the seats given to the enemies of peasants, Sahajanand resigned from the Congress Working Committee. However, BPC President Rajendra Prasad persuaded him to remain in Congress.<sup>65</sup> It was difficult for Sahajanand to influence peasants to vote for the Congress as

most of its candidates were landlords; nonetheless, he succeeded in doing so. The Kisan Sabha leaders toured across the state to attract peasants and labourers and convinced them to vote for the Congress.<sup>66</sup> Thus—the ‘Kisan Sabha’—Lata Singh argued, ‘was largely responsible for building a rural base for the Congress in Bihar and contributed significantly to the Congress’s overwhelming victory in the 1937 elections’.<sup>67</sup> However, later on, the Congress leaders did not acknowledge the role of Sahajanand and the peasants in the assembly election.

After the formation of the Congress ministry, the Kisan Sabha urged the government to appoint a committee to examine the appalling burden of debts of peasants thoroughly to ‘devise ways and means of liquidating agricultural indebtedness’.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Congress promised the waiving of debts, rent reduction, and the abolition of rents and arrears of all kinds.<sup>69</sup> It introduced two bills in the Legislative Assembly i.e. Tenancy Reforms (Amendment) Act and Agricultural Income Tax Bill. However, the Tenancy Reforms (Amendment) Act was sent to the Select Committee for reconsideration due to strong opposition by Kameshwar Singh, S.A. Manzoor, and G.D. Singh—all landlords. The Bihar Landholder’s Association even blamed the Kisan Sabha and socialist leaders for pressurising the Congress to bring radical changes in the tenancy bill.<sup>70</sup> They explained that legislation cannot resolve peasants’ problems, but an atmosphere of reform, both by landlords and peasants, can bring changes.<sup>71</sup> Kameshwar Singh also requested Rajendra Prasad to ask the Bihar government instructing peasants to ‘discharge their duties towards their landlords by paying up their rent as they fall due’.<sup>72</sup> In the view of the threat of financial support from landlords, the Congress modified its amendment in the Tenancy Act.<sup>73</sup> Earlier it proposed to abolish all systems of rent in produce, but after the deal with landlords, it only eliminated the *danabandi system*, while *batai*, *mankshap*,<sup>74</sup> and *salami* remained the same.<sup>75</sup> As per the amendment, if peasants failed in paying rent continuously for four years, landlords got the right to file a suit for such arrears.<sup>76</sup>

Rajendra Prasad described this amendment as pro-peasant and said that peasants ‘were able to reap the advantages of a new law almost immediately’.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, C.P.N. Sinha<sup>78</sup> praised the Congress ministry for providing very reasonable concessions to landlords.<sup>79</sup> Some landlords also appreciated Maulana Abul Kalam Azad for his intervention to make changes in tenancy law.<sup>80</sup> However, the Kisan Sabha while describing it as ‘worthless’ and as an ‘example of an exhibition of Congress autocracy’ completely opposed the amendment.

## Agrarian Issues, Peasant Movements, and the Congress Politics in Bihar, 1929-1950

Sahajanand accused the Congress of entering into 'an unholy alliance' with landlords.<sup>81</sup> It was the Kisan Sabha's attack on the zamindari system, as argued by Tirumal Mundargi, which 'started the process of alienation between the Sabha and the Congress'.<sup>82</sup> The Kisan Sabha celebrated an 'anti-agreement week' (July 25 to July 31, 1938)<sup>83</sup>, and warned the Congress leaders 'against such nefarious provisions being included in the Tenancy Bill'.<sup>84</sup> The amendment was also criticised in the fifth and sixth Kisan Sabha conferences held at Bachwara of Monghyr district and Waini of Darbhanga district in 1937 and 1939 respectively. Between 1937-1938, there broke out a wide range of peasant unrest led by the Kisan Sabha and CSP which challenged the orthodox leadership of the Congress.<sup>85</sup> A Kisan Demands Day was held on November 19, 1937, where lakhs of peasants participated in the rally without a single violent incident. In 1938, another rally was organised in Bankipur Maidan (now Gandhi Maidan) in Patna. However, it was not successful as the government enforced IPC Section 144 to prevent the rally.<sup>86</sup>

The Congress ministry blamed the Kisan Sabha for anti-Congress activities and attempted to break their movements by employing state machinery. Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Patel also criticised Sahajanand's stand against the Congress.<sup>87</sup> Three Kisan Sabha activists and thirteen peasants were threatened with imprisonment by the Sub-Divisional Officer of Sitamarhi.<sup>88</sup> In 1937, the District Congress Committee (DCC) of Champaran and Saran districts issued resolutions not to let Kisan Sabha hold meetings and interrupted peasants who came to participate in the rallies.<sup>89</sup> To weaken the Kisan Sabha, the All India Khet-Mazdoor Sammelan was also to be organised also under the leadership of Sardar Patel during the Haripura session of the AICC however it could not be held.<sup>90</sup> Upon this, the peasant leaders questioned the arbitrary decisions of the BPC and the DCC to stop their members from attending the Sabha meetings while regarding their interference as 'not only ultra vires but even mischievous'.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, they managed to organise twenty-two out of the twenty-four scheduled meetings. Apart from it, the Congress leaders also criticised Sahajanand's *danda* which had become the symbol of resistance for peasants with the slogan *lath hamara zindabad*.<sup>92</sup> For clarifying the Kisan Sabha's stand vis-a-vis the Congress, Sahajanand, Jai Prakash Narayan, Gangasaran Singh, Rambriksha Benipuri, Ramnandan Mishra and Dhanraj Sharma signed a petition for informing the Congress that it did not intend to harm the Congress, but it only meant to 'enable ministers to enforce the demands in the election manifesto'.<sup>93</sup>

***Bakasht Satyagraha***

*Bakasht* satyagraha was one of the critical movements led by the Kisan Sabha that challenged the autocratic nature of landlords. The issue of *Bakasht* land came into notice after 1934, primarily from Barahiya Tal village of Monghyr district, when landlords confiscated peasants' land on their failure to pay taxes on time, during the Great Depression.<sup>94</sup> The high land taxes and the demand for occupancy right were the main reasons behind *bakasht* satyagraha. In Barahiya Tal village, peasants had to pay taxes for all growing seasons even if the land was cultivated for one crop once a year. Also, they were neither given payment receipts nor any documents related to land revenue. This prevented them from claiming occupancy right over land they had been cultivating for the last twelve years, as per the Bihar Tenancy Act of 1885. The rise of peasant movements at various places made these peasants aware of their rights and even encouraged them to cultivate the land without the prior consent of landlords.

When Rameshwar Prasad Singh, a landlord, sold about 1500 bighas of *bakasht* land at Reora, huge protests broke out.<sup>95</sup> The peasants asked Yadunandan Sharma to lead them who, after consultation with Sahajanand, reached Reora, where about 25,000 peasants including women and children gathered to listen to him.<sup>96</sup> Consequently, a satyagraha was launched at Reora, which soon became a pilgrimage for peasants.<sup>97</sup> Petitions, meetings, speeches, and demonstrations were adopted as methods to fight the landlords. In this movement, women too participated in large numbers. This struggle spread over the districts of Patna, Shahabad, Champaran, and Darbhanga. In May 1939, about 500 peasants marched to Chhapra under the leadership of Rahul Sankrityana to put their demands before the government.<sup>98</sup> However, the landlords adopted several methods to stifle peasants' agitation over *bakasht* land. In Darbhanga, many peasants were injured in firing by landlords.<sup>99</sup> In Monghyr, landlords Nawab Ibrahim and Zulum Singh deployed their goons.<sup>100</sup> Hundreds of peasants, including women and children, were brutally assaulted and were jailed with hefty fines in Gaya, Saran, Patna, Monghyr, Darbhanga, Shahabad, Bhagalpur, and other districts. Karyanand Sharma and many other peasant leaders including the elected AICS President Rahul Sankrityana were arrested in connection with *bakasht* satyagraha.<sup>101</sup> They were released only after the Haripura session of the AICC.

## **Agrarian Issues, Peasant Movements, and the Congress Politics in Bihar, 1929-1950**

Congress considered this satyagraha as a challenge to its class interest because the satyagraha questioned the landlord's domination in Bihar. Hence, the Congress openly sided with the landlords for this 'gangster methods' backed by police atrocities.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, *bakasht* satyagraha continued in various districts of Bihar even after the Congress attempted to stop it.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Gaya DCC also supported this satyagraha while neglecting the BPCC's resolution to oppose it.<sup>104</sup> The Gaya session of the AIKS criticised the government for not taking any action to solve the *bakasht* issue. This session 'gave a clear-cut direction to the political thinking of the Sabha and its leadership and indicated a leftist line with an unmistakable slant towards socialist ideas'.<sup>105</sup> Later, the Congress formed a committee with Rajendra Prasad to inquire about this development, but no solution was seen. Following this, the Bakasht Restoration Act was passed by the Congress ministry which proposed to restore the *bakasht* land to peasants whose land was less than six acres, sold between 1928 and 1936. However, neither land was restored, nor were peasants' condition improved. Nonetheless, Congress succeeded in alienating the peasant movements in Bihar, and by the time the Second World War broke out, peasant movements steadily declined due to the changing priorities of the peasant leaders.<sup>106</sup>

### **Internal Conflicts within the Kisan Sabha**

The concerns and priorities of the Kisan Sabha got altered during the Second World War because primarily it was the 'agrarian and economic questions' for which the Kisan Sabha was formed, not politics which later it got involved with.<sup>107</sup> Initially, the Kisan Sabha leaders considered the Second World War as a war of imperialism, and neither spoke against it nor supported it. In an Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh, Sahajanand spoke against the war while sharing a stage with the Forward Bloc leader Subhas Chandra Bose and leftist leader— Dhanraj Sharma.<sup>108</sup> The AIKS, in its fifth session at Palasa in 1940, adopted a resolution to oppose the British government on war policy and asked peasants not to pay rent and taxes to the British government.<sup>109</sup> The BPKS, the CPI and the Forward Block adopted the same resolution.<sup>110</sup> They criticised the Congress's resolutions on the war as it had only resigned from the Interim government because the British government took India into war without her consent. However, in June 1941, when Germany attacked Russia, the Kisan Sabha leaders changed their positions and decided to support the Allied powers against the Axis powers in the Nagpur meeting held on February 12-13, 1942.<sup>111</sup> The change in their

## Jitendra Kumar

position was the result of the re-grouping of forces.<sup>112</sup> The leaders even advised peasants to collect and arrange funds for helping Russia and China in the war.<sup>113</sup>

The Kisan Sabha leaders and activists were also associated with other political organisations like the Congress, Congress Socialist Party (CSP), Forward Bloc, and Communist Party of India (CPI). Due to the diverse aims and ideologies, their relationship with these organizations also was changing over a while. By 1936 differences broke out between the Congress and Kisan Sabha, and it further worsened by 1939. During this time, the Kisan Sabha leaders were very much influenced by the CSP. There were differences within the organization also over the war. The socialist and the communist supporters of the Sabha clashed over this issue during the BPKS's conference at Dumrao on March 8 and 9, 1941.<sup>114</sup> By this time only the Communists and the Forward Bloc remained in Sabha. On top of it, Sahajanand instructed the then BPKS President Yamuna Karjee, to remove Awadheshwar Prasad Sinha and other CSP leaders from the Sabha. Meanwhile, Yamuna Karjee moved to take action against the socialist leader, Awadheshwar Prasad Sinha, Sinha and his followers 'walked out after much exchange of abuse and promptly formed a rival executive' with Rambriksha Benipuri as their president.<sup>115</sup> In the conference, the socialists attacked the Maharaja Bahadur of Dumraon, and the British government, and its sugarcane policy.<sup>116</sup> Apart from it, the BPKS's secretary Mathura Prasad Singh also resigned.<sup>117</sup> The Forward Bloc supporters showed black flag to Sahajanand on his way to Sherghatty in Gaya district where the BPKS organised its next conference on April 4 and 5, 1942. The socialist leaders also hosted a conference led by Abul Hayat Chand at Patepur in Muzaffarpur district on April 18 and 19, 1942 where Basawan Singh and Reasat Karim were some of the prominent speakers. They viewed the war as 'imperialist' and expressed that 'the Indians should take no part in it'.<sup>118</sup> They also raised funds for an All India Kisan Conference in opposition to the Sahajanand's faction which was to organise a conference at Bihta in May 1942.

The Kisan Sabha again got divided when Sahajanand asked peasants not to participate in the Quit-India Movement. Although it expressed 'full sympathy with the idea of independence and its condemnation of Government repression',<sup>119</sup> it wanted to focus 'their attention on helping Russia and China to defeat the Fascist powers so that a Kisan-Mazdoor Raj might eventually be established'.<sup>120</sup> Sahajanand believed helping Russia implied helping Britain which was 'necessary not through love of the British, but to save the country from fascism, a greater peril than British Imperialism'.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, in 1942, Sahajanand and Yadunandan

## **Agrarian Issues, Peasant Movements, and the Congress Politics in Bihar, 1929-1950**

Sharma, AIKS General Secretary and BPKS President respectively, perceived the violence in the name of national struggle as unethical and condemned it while claiming 'no country has ever gained its freedom by indulging in acts of goondaism, looting, robbery, and sabotage'.<sup>122</sup> In the Ninth Session of BPKS, Sahajanand requested peasants 'not to struggle unnecessarily' and 'to have patience and wait' for the appropriate time to come.<sup>123</sup> He further appealed to the Bihar government to release all political prisoners so that they could fight against the Fascist powers. On this, Governor Steward reminded Viceroy Linlithgow that Sahajanand 'was one of our more offensive critics, however, due to the re-grouping of forces, has come out very hot and strong in support of the Government'.<sup>124</sup> The Kisan Sabha also supported the government's "Grow More Food Campaign" and advised peasants to use various types of fertilisers to increase agricultural productivity.<sup>125</sup>

As a result of the Kisan Sabha's support to the British, the anti-Sahajanand group, especially the socialists, more aggressively participated in the Quit India Movement against the British. They also organised the Socialist Kisan Sabha in which about sixty thousand peasants participated while the Sahajanand-led Kisan Sabha had the participation of only about five thousand peasants. Many socialists who were formerly Kisan Sabha leaders were also organising peasant movements in the villages, despite repeated appeals by Sahajanand and Sankrityana not to do so.<sup>126</sup> It is to be noted that when the question of the national movement arose, the peasants' movement became insignificant. The membership of the Kisan Sabha declined from 2,50,000 in 1939 to 54,000 in March 1942 and then to 27,168 within the next month. Nevertheless, Sahajanand and his associates continued their efforts to bring peasants into the Kisan Sabha movement.<sup>127</sup>

Another conflict within the Kisan Sabha arose in 1945 when Sahajanand, the AIKS President, suspended the AIKS General Secretary Bankim Mukherjee and the Central Kisan Council (CKC) citing their involvement in anti-Kisan Sabha activities. He showed that the functioning of the AIKS had been excellent between 1936 to 1943, but the communists pressurised all progressive and leftist peasant leaders to leave the Kisan Sabha.<sup>128</sup> Soon after, on March 2, 1945, citing his inability to accept the dominance of the communists in the Kisan Sabha and their refusal to allow Congressmen in Sabha meetings, Sahajanand resigned from the AIKS. However, he decided to remain in the BPKS as it was very dear to his heart and also not dominated by the communists.<sup>129</sup> However, the decision to resign from the AIKS

## **Jitendra Kumar**

soon changes, and Sahajanand decided to stay on and lead the AIKS democratically. He wrote to General Secretary Bankim Mukherjee in a later dated March 4, 1945 that:

Having tendered my resignation from the Presidentship of AIKS to the President, I need not send it to anybody else under article 9 (b), as after the suspension of the General Secretary and the Central Office, the President himself is responsible for all function... As the office and the General Secretary both stand suspended, the President has not accepted the resignation because in that case there will be no authoritative channel to deal with the matters that arise in the meantime.<sup>130</sup>

On Sahajanand's decision to revoke his own resignation, Bankim Mukherjee has this to say: 'Swamiji wanted to impose on the Sabha his own choice of office bearers with himself as its General Secretary'.<sup>131</sup> Consequently, AIKS called an emergency meeting of CKS—without Sahajanand—at Calcutta on March 8 to 9, 1945, conveyed by General Secretary Bankim Mukherjee and presided over by Karyanand Sharma. CKS criticised Sahajanand's arbitrary decision and resolved that:

Last year Swamiji tried to take similar action just on the eve of the Bezwada session against Andhra Kisan Sabha but the CKS did not endorse it, and its members challenged his authority to do so. Last year Swamiji was the General Secretary and this year he is the President. It appears that Swamiji thinks that disciplinary action is his personal prerogative irrespective of the office he holds. The CKS once again records that the All Indian Kisan Sabha is a democratic organisation with its own constitution and under it Swamiji had no authority to act in the manner he has done.<sup>132</sup>

Nevertheless, Sahajanand defended his actions against the general secretary and the CSK and said:

Now I have gone a dictator if I want the same General Secretaryship for myself? The real fact is that I am no longer willing to allow the Sabha's office to carry on communist propaganda in any form and have become and want to be strict in future. That is why my sole offence for being called a dictator.<sup>133</sup>



## **Agrarian Issues, Peasant Movements, and the Congress Politics in Bihar, 1929-1950**

Under Sahajanand's directive, BPKS passed a resolution asking the AIKS leaders not to attend the 9<sup>th</sup> Session of AIKS to be held at Netrakona on April 2-9, 1945 as it was being organised unconstitutionally, and dominated by the communists.<sup>134</sup> However, AIKS convened its conference presided over by Muzaffar Ahmad. It criticised the BPKS's resolution against the Netrakona session while requesting Sahajanand to withdraw his decision and return to the AIKS.<sup>135</sup> This session also sent out a clarification that the AIKS is not dominated by the communist ideology in spite of communist majority in most of the provincial Kisan Sabhas.<sup>136</sup> Even after persuasions, Muzaffar Ahmad could not get Sahajanand to agree to return to the AIKS. Later on, Puroshottam Das Tandon proposed an idea to form a new peasant organisation which was supported by Sahajanand, Indulal Yagnik, and N.G. Ranga.<sup>137</sup> The AIKS was re-established in the name of 'Hind Kisan Sabha' at Bombay on July 9, 1945, under Tandon's presidentship and Sahajanand as General Secretary.<sup>138</sup> Both peasant leaders praised the Congress and considered it as a progressive organisation which attempted to work for national independence.<sup>139</sup>

### **Abolition of Zamindari**

After the Second World War, the Kisan Sabha concentrated on three issues, namely the cultivation of *bakasht* land, transforming *bhaoli* land into cash rents from produce, and the abolition of zamindari. The left-wing forces also organised 'Kisan Front' supported by CPI, CSP, and Forward Bloc to air the grievances of peasants.<sup>140</sup> In Monghyr, peasant movement was led by the CSP while in Champaran all parties joined hands to fight for *bakasht* land.<sup>141</sup> In contrast, landlords reorganised themselves and rioted wherever there were clashes over *bakasht* and *bhaoli* land.<sup>142</sup> They also tried to take over *bhaoli* land in Gaya district and even employed *lathials* for cutting the peasants' crops by force.

Like the election of 1937, the Kisan Sabha again supported the Congress in the 1946 election when the Congress's manifestoes promised for the abolition of zamindari. The CPI also came up with its election manifestoes ensuring radical agrarian reforms.<sup>143</sup> This election witnessed clashes between the Congress and the left parties. One such incident was in Monghyr where the CPI candidate Karyanand Sharma, fighting against the Congress candidate S.K. Sinha, was injured during the campaign.<sup>144</sup> The Congress secured a majority in the election and put forth the proposal on zamindari abolition, as per its earlier promise. The Congress introduced *The Bihar State Management of Estate and Tenures Bill* in the Bihar Legislative Assembly,<sup>145</sup>

## Jitendra Kumar

but landlords vigorously challenged the bill.<sup>146</sup> Thus, the bill was repealed and reintroduced as *Bihar Land Reforms Bill* in 1949 which got the President's assent on September 11, 1950.<sup>147</sup> Although, the Congress government was able to pass the land reforms bill in the Assembly because it had a majority, it failed to pass the land ceiling bill till 1961. The government faced violent agitations and demonstrations by landlords in various parts of the state. C.P.N. Sinha wrote to Rajendra Prasad and Mahatma Gandhi and sought recommendations from Abul Kalam Azad for the future of landlords in India.<sup>148</sup> Landlords even committed a series of violent acts against peasants to oppose zamindari abolition.

However, the amendment or the enactment did not help the peasants. Moreover, their legislation prompted landlords to evict peasants from their land.<sup>149</sup> The Congress made promises to hand over power to the peasants and labourers once the British left India. However, it soon turned out that its leaders had no such intention for the betterment of the people living in the countryside.<sup>150</sup> On the changing attitude of the Congress leaders, Sahajanand expressed:

Congress is a historic organisation. Its work is also historical. It has performed its duty and achieved its aims. All people of the country have contributed to its making. The Congress leadership is also great, and these leaders have also performed their duties well. The communion between the peasants and the Congress has remained till now. No more can be said on this. However, now, I have a deep level of disagreement with some of the leaders of the Congress who are trying tooth and nail to drag it towards a direction which leads to nowhere. In all these, an imminent threat towards peasants and labourers is distinctly visible.<sup>151</sup>

On the face of the failure of the Congress to resolve the agrarian crisis after independence Sahajanand 'coordinated 18 leftist organisations', in April 1948, to form an All India United Kisan Sabha. Subsequently, he resigned from all committees of the Congress on December 6, 1948.<sup>152</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Although the Kisan Sabha 'started within a reformist frame of reference', it got 'transformed into a revolutionary organisation' by 1935-36.<sup>153</sup> Its relation with the Congress worsened by 1937-38. During 1941-42, Sahajanand's activities separated the Kisan Sabha from the CSP and Forward Bloc and made it more attached with the communists.<sup>154</sup> However, Sahajanand disagreed with their policies after 1943 and by 1945 he left them in search of a new political alignment.<sup>155</sup> Due to his unstable political alliances with different organisations of the state, Walter Hauser said that 'he had misjudged the sentiments of the peasants of India and Bihar'.<sup>156</sup> Hauser even considered Sahajanand as basically 'a practical observer of the peasant problem' not as 'ideologue'.<sup>157</sup> Certainly, Sahajanand had not any permanent alliance with any political parties of colonial Bihar. Still, it was not because of his interest; instead, it was the need for survival of peasant movements which put him close to or away from such organisations. Besides, historians always questioned the nature of leadership provided to the Kisan Sabha. Its leadership came only from the affluent and middle peasantry, while lower peasants and labourers remained in the periphery of the peasant movement.<sup>158</sup> Its leaders belonged to landholding families 'who sought to defend themselves against zamindari pressure'.<sup>159</sup> Hauser described them as 'the half-educated product of high schools and colleges' who came to achieve 'political adventures'.<sup>160</sup> Apart from it, many scholars claimed that peasant movements led by the Kisan Sabha were not successful in Bihar. Hauser observed it as a 'movement' which could not evolve into 'a formal organisation',<sup>161</sup> while A.N. Das saw it as 'a movement rather than an organisation' because it was limited to meetings, demonstrations, annual conventions.<sup>162</sup> Jawaid Alam argued that 'the social base of the Congress movement in Bihar was stronger than that of the Kisan Sabha'.<sup>163</sup> For Alam, the Kisan Sabha focused on 'an increased militancy and radicalism in the national politics' whereas Congress influenced the people through taking politics to them.<sup>164</sup> Lata Singh has shown that the Kisan Sabha only succeeded in mobilising and organising peasants when it raised their issues, but when such an issue did not exist, its organised numerical strength was bound to recede'.<sup>165</sup>

Whatever arguments are given by historical writing on the Kisan Sabha it should not be forgotten that the Congress ministry brought zamindari abolition due to the heavy pressure by peasant movements led by the Kisan Sabha. Peasant movements in Bihar were 'relentless war against hunger, poverty, servitude, and humiliation' which raised voices 'against capitalism

## Jitendra Kumar

and landlordism' who were the principal enemies of peasants.<sup>166</sup> It was argued that 'swaraj will be meaningless to the peasants if the white bureaucracy was substituted by a brown one.'<sup>167</sup> Peasant leaders used dialogues, meetings, gatherings, rallies, and conferences as the methods of resistance against the oppressive nature of the British government and indigenous landlords. Peasants and labourers were motivated by the Kisan Sabha to raise their voices. In his speech at Nasirganj in 1935, Sahajanand told a gathering of peasants:

It is our duty to ventilate our grievances. If we have troubles, we shall be considered fools by the world and also in the court of God if we do not tell our troubles to anybody. You will have to speak out even if someone holds your tongue to prevent speaking.<sup>168</sup>

In another speech at Bihar Sharif in 1940, he said:

Peasants, we will recite a mantra. Peasants have to be in the real issue; they have to fight the actual battle. Somewhere we have to be beaten by sticks, and have to do procession anywhere. Our benevolent people will say the land will be auctioned. However, we will not go for lobbying in the court. The landlords will get decree by their money, will auction the land, will sell it, and will get registered in the paper... Do not go for registry in the paper. Go to the farm, light up the fire there, look everywhere where 144 is imposed, and where 107 is... Section 144 and 107 are not in the field but is in the brain. Peasant has to do this only. This is the satyagraha of the peasant.<sup>169</sup>

Peasants unitedly struggled under the banner of the Kisan Sabha. Their main rivals were landlords. However, the Kisan Sabha had to struggle against the Congress, the socialists, the communists, and even with its members. It perceived 'the political struggle as a means to the economic ends of agrarian change'.<sup>170</sup> After Sahajanand's death on June 26, 1950, at the residence of Muchkund Sharma in Muzaffarpur, Pandit Yadunandan Sharma and Karyanand Sharma led this peasant organisation and continued to raise peasant's issues.<sup>171</sup>

After independence, the Congress leadership 'became conservative' who adopted many policies and provisions of the colonial government that could not provide any radical shift towards agrarian problems.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, peasants are still suffering from various agrarian

## Agrarian Issues, Peasant Movements, and the Congress Politics in Bihar, 1929-1950

problems against which the Kisan Sabha had struggled in the colonial period. It is an irony of Bihar state that the effect of the zamindari system continues till this day. Despite the introduction of the zamindari bill in 1946, until 1961 there was no legislation on the land ceiling. Only after 1970, land ceiling gradually started, but it was only a half-hearted effort. Now only a tiny fraction of land is redistributed to the landless peasants and labourers of the state.<sup>173</sup>

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### Notes & References:

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<sup>1</sup> See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), and Sunil Sen, *Peasant Movements in India: Mid-nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New Delhi: K.P. Bagachi & Co., 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Sen, *Peasant Movements*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ravinder Kumar, "The Deccan Riots of 1875", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (August 1965), 613-635.

<sup>4</sup> S.K. Mittal, *Peasant Uprisings and Mahatma Gandhi in North Bihar: A Politico-Economic Study of Indigo Industry 1817-1917 with especial reference to Champaran* (Meerut: Anu Prakashan, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Arvind N. Das, *Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar, 1900-1980* (Delhi: Manohar, 1983), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Bihar State Archives (BSA), "Note on the Kisan Sabha Conference held at Bhagalpur", File No 84/1921, in *Kisan Movements: In the Records of Bihar State Archives, Vol. I* (Patna: Directorate of Bihar State Archives, 2015), 59.

<sup>7</sup> The Kisan Sabha or BPKS is used for Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.

<sup>8</sup> The Congress is used for Indian National Congress, and the Congress ministry stands for the Bihar government led by Bihar Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC).

<sup>9</sup> Rose Yardumian, "Record of the Kisan Sabha," *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 14 (June 6, 1945), 141-44.

<sup>10</sup> Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935-1946* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 118-119.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Hauser, *The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929-1942: A Study of an Indian Peasant Movement* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2019), 120.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113.

<sup>13</sup> Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, *Kisan Sabha Ke Samsaran* (Allahabad: New Literature, 1947), 27.

<sup>14</sup> All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), *The Speech of the Chairman Swami Sahajanand Saraswati*, 8<sup>th</sup> Session of All India Kisan Conference, Bezwada, March 14-15, 1944, 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS), *Address of the President Swami Sahajanand Saraswati*, 13<sup>th</sup> Bihar Provincial Kisan Conference, Berho (Hazaribagh), June 29-30, 1946, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh [My Life Struggle]*, ed. Avdhesh Pradhan (New Delhi: Grantha Silpi, 2000), 171.

<sup>18</sup> Yogendra Sharma, *Bihar Me Kisan Andonal Ki Samasyaen* (Patna: BPKS, 1946), 5.

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- <sup>19</sup> National Archives of India (NAI), *Dr Rajendra Prasad Papers (RP Papers)*, File No. VII/37, Coll. 1, 81.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.
- <sup>26</sup> Rajni Palme Dutt, *Agrarian Crises in India: India Today Series, No. 3*, Printed in the underground press, iii.
- <sup>27</sup> Arvind N. Das, "Peasants and Peasant Organisations: The Kisan Sabha in Bihar," in *Agrarian Movements in India: Studies on 20<sup>th</sup> Century Bihar*, ed. Arvind N. Das (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 42.
- <sup>28</sup> Walter Hauser, *Sahajanand on Agricultural Labour and the Rural Poor* (Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 21.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.
- <sup>30</sup> NAI, *RP Papers*, File No. VII/37, Coll. 1, 123.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.
- <sup>32</sup> Dutt, *Agrarian Crises*, 23.
- <sup>33</sup> Abhyudaya, *Kisan Bhukten Mar Rahe Hai, Zamindar Sambhal Jaye*, August 5, 1931.
- <sup>34</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 173.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-183. Though Sahajanand clarified that his idea of the Kisan Sabha was just 'reformist' in nature, and 'revolution' had nothing to do with that.
- <sup>36</sup> Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 99.
- <sup>37</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 184.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.
- <sup>39</sup> Tirumal Mundargi, "Congress and Zamindars: Collaboration and Consultation in Bihar, 1915-1936," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 25, No. 22 (June 2, 1990), 1217-1222.
- <sup>40</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 207.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.
- <sup>42</sup> Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 100.
- <sup>43</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 224.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-26.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-238.
- <sup>47</sup> Awadheshwar Prasad Sinha, *Bihar Prantiya Kisan Sabha Ki Report 1929-1935*, 10.
- <sup>48</sup> NAI, "The Manifesto of the BPKS", *RP Papers*, File No. IX/36, Coll. 2, 12.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> Das, "Peasants and Peasant Organisations", 68-69.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.
- <sup>52</sup> Awadheshwar Prasad Sinha, "Kisan Movement in Bihar," *The Congress Socialist*, Bombay, April 9, 1939.
- <sup>53</sup> *The Searchlight*, September 19, 1934,
- <sup>54</sup> *The Times of India (TOI)*, August 4, 1936.
- <sup>55</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 242.
- <sup>56</sup> NAI, "Letter of Andhra Peasants' Institute to Sri Jairamdas Daulatram", *RP Papers*, May 18, 1936, File No. IX/36 Coll. 1, 7.
- <sup>57</sup> NAI, "Congress and Mass Contact," *RP Papers*, File No. IX/36, Coll. 1, 21.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 105.
- <sup>60</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 254.
- <sup>61</sup> Jawaid Alam, *Government and Politics in Colonial Bihar* (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2004), 152.
- <sup>62</sup> NAI, "The Manifesto of the BPKS," 12.

- <sup>63</sup> NAI, "Letter from Rajendra Prasad to Vallabhai Patel, dated November 17, 1936", *RP Papers*, File No. 1/36, Coll. 3.
- <sup>64</sup> NAI, "Letter from Rajendra Prasad to Sahajanand, dated November 13, 1936", *RP Papers*, File No. 1/36, Coll. 3.
- <sup>65</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 257.
- <sup>66</sup> *The Searchlight*, December 8 and 18, 1936.
- <sup>67</sup> Lata Singh, "The Bihar Kisan Sabha Movement: 1933-1939," *Social Scientist*, Vol. 20, No. 5/6 (May-June 1992), 21-33.
- <sup>68</sup> Sinha, *Bihar Prantiya Kisan Sabha Ki Report*, 26.
- <sup>69</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 259.
- <sup>70</sup> *Indian Nation*, September 29, 1937.
- <sup>71</sup> NAI, "Agreement between Zamindars and Congress," *RP Papers*, File No. 1-A/38, Coll.1, 45.
- <sup>72</sup> NAI, "Letter from Kameshwar Singh to Rajendra Prasad, dated April 21, 1938", *RP Papers*, File No. 1-A/38, Coll. 1, 22.
- <sup>73</sup> NAI, "Agreement," 17.
- <sup>74</sup> NAI, "Manifestoes of BPKS."
- <sup>75</sup> Awadheshwar Prasad Sinha, "Relief to Zamindars," *The Congress Socialist*, Bombay, August 27, 1938, 1.
- <sup>76</sup> NAI, "Agreement," 40-41.
- <sup>77</sup> Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1957), 459.
- <sup>78</sup> C.P.N. Sinha was the Manager of Darbhanga Raja and alsoan opposition leader in the Bihar Legislative Assembly.
- <sup>79</sup> Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, *Rent Reduction in Bihar: How It Works* (Patna: Sita Ram Ashram, 1939).
- <sup>80</sup> *Indian Nation*, July 6 and 7, 1938.
- <sup>81</sup> *TOI*, January 26, 1938.
- <sup>82</sup> Mundargi, "Congress and Zamindars," 1220.
- <sup>83</sup> *TOI*, July 23, 1938.
- <sup>84</sup> Sinha, "Relief to Zamindars".
- <sup>85</sup> Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 110-111.
- <sup>86</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 268.
- <sup>87</sup> *TOI*, January 12 and March 31, 1938.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, December 21, 1937.
- <sup>89</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 269-270.
- <sup>90</sup> Hauser, *Sahajanand*, 2.
- <sup>91</sup> *Congress Socialist*, December 12, 1937.
- <sup>92</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 272.
- <sup>93</sup> *TOI*, December 25, 1937.
- <sup>94</sup> Landlords had control of mainly two types of land; (i) zirat land, cultivated by landlords themselves with hired labourers, and (ii) *bakasht* land, leased out to peasants for cultivation. On the peasant's failure to pay taxes, landlords took back *bakasht* land from peasants.
- <sup>95</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 276.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>98</sup> Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 121.
- <sup>99</sup> NAI, *Fortnightly Report* (2), Home Political, File No. 18/3/1941.
- <sup>100</sup> Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 125.
- <sup>101</sup> AIKS, *Annual Report of AIKS*, 1939-40, 6.
- <sup>102</sup> M.A. Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha* (Calcutta: National Book, 1974), 320.
- <sup>103</sup> *TOI*, January 17, 1939.
- <sup>104</sup> Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 278.
- <sup>105</sup> Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, 61.
- <sup>106</sup> Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 157.
- <sup>107</sup> Suman Kumar Singh, *Peasants Politics in Bihar: 1940-47* (MPhil diss., Jawaharlal Nehru

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<sup>108</sup> Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, *All India Anti-Compromise Conference (First Session): Address of the Chairman of Reception Committee*, Kisan Nagar, Ramgarh, March 19-20, 1940.

<sup>109</sup> Rasul, *A History of All India Kisan Sabha*, 66-67.

<sup>110</sup> NAI, *Fortnightly Report* (1), Home Political, File No. 18/6/1940.

<sup>111</sup> Indradeep, *Kisan Sabha and Swami Sahajanand* (Bombay: AIKS, 1945), 12.

<sup>112</sup> Rakesh Gupta, *Bihar Peasantry and Kisan Sabha: 1936-1947* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1982), 113.

<sup>113</sup> NAI, *Fortnightly Report* (1), Home Political, File No. 18/4/1942.

<sup>114</sup> Hauser, *The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha*, 168-169.

<sup>115</sup> NAI, *Fortnightly Report* (2), Home Political, File No. 18/3/1941, 152.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *The Searchlight*, May 29, 1942.

<sup>118</sup> NAI, *Fortnightly Report* (2), Home Political, File No. 18/4/42, 230-231.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, 86.

<sup>123</sup> Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, *Presidential Address of Bihar Provincial Kisan Conference*, 9<sup>th</sup> Session, Sherghatti, Gaya, April 4-5, 1942, 28-29.

<sup>124</sup> Cited by Singh, *Peasants Politics in Bihar*; 26.

<sup>125</sup> E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Kisan on the March: For Food and Freedom*, Resolution of the 7<sup>th</sup> Session of AIKS, Bhakna, April 1947 (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1943), 13.

<sup>126</sup> NAI, *Fortnightly Report* (2), Home Political, File No. 18/9/1942.

<sup>127</sup> Rasul, *A History of All India Kisan Sabha*, 98.

<sup>128</sup> Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, *Kisan Sabha Ke Samsmaran* (Allahabad: New Literature, 1947), 17.

<sup>129</sup> *Hindustan Standard*, March 6, 1945, also see *TOI*, March 5, 1945.

<sup>130</sup> AIKS, *Slogans of Netrakona: Report of the Ninth Annual Session of the AIKS*, Netrakona, Bengal, April 2-9, 1945, 55-56.

<sup>131</sup> *Hindustan Standard*, March 2, 1945.

<sup>132</sup> Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, 331.

<sup>133</sup> *Hindustan Standard*, March 9, 1945.

<sup>134</sup> AIKS, *Slogans of Netrakona*, 57.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>137</sup> *TOI*, September 21, 1945.

<sup>138</sup> Saraswati, *Kisan Sabha Ke Samsmaran*, 17.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>140</sup> NAI, *Agrarian Situation in Bihar*, Home Political, File No. 125/1946.

<sup>141</sup> NAI, *Fortnightly Report* (2), Home Political, File No. 18/5/1947.

<sup>142</sup> NAI, *Agrarian Situation in Bihar*.

<sup>143</sup> *Hunkar*, January 6, 1946.

<sup>144</sup> *The Indian Nation*, February 6, 1946.

<sup>145</sup> *TOI*, December 21, 1949, p. 4.

<sup>146</sup> *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debate*, December 30, 1949.

<sup>147</sup> See Notification no 5067. LR dated 24.9.1950. President's assent published in Bihar Gazette (extraordinary) dated 25.9.1950.

<sup>148</sup> NAI, "Letter from C.P.N. Sinha to Rajendra Prasad, dated April 19, 1947," *RP Papers*, File No. 7-A/46-47, Coll. 1.

<sup>149</sup> Sharma, *Bihar Me Kisan Andolan*, 15-16.

<sup>150</sup> Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, *Ab Kya Ho?* (Patna: Hunkar Publication, 1947), 32.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, "Preface" to *Ab Kya Ho?* Original Speech in Hindi: "कांग्रेस एक ऐतिहासिक संस्था है। इसका कार्य भी ऐतिहासिक है। उसने अपना फर्ज अदा किया और लक्ष्य प्राप्त किया है। उसके बनाने में देश के सभी वर्गों का पुरा हाथ रहा है। कांग्रेस के नेता भी महान हैं और उन्होंने अपना कर्तव्य



पाला है। कांग्रेस के साथ अब तक का जो संबंध रहा है वो भी अपनी जगह पर ही रहा है। इसमें हमें कुछ नहीं कहना है। मगर अब आगे कांग्रेस को घसीटने तथा बनाए रखने के जो भागीरथ प्रयत्न इन नेताओं की ओर से हो रहे हैं, उन्ही से हमारा गहरा मतभेद है। इसमें हमें किसानों एवं मजदूरों के लिये खतरे ही खतरे नजर आ रहे हैं।”

<sup>152</sup> G.C. Pandey, “Swami Sahajanand and His World View: Some New Perspective,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 71 (2010-11), 677-687.

<sup>153</sup> Kaushal K. Sharma, “Elements of Continuity and Change in Peasant Activism in Twentieth-Century Bihar,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 62 (2001), 578-586.

<sup>154</sup> Hauser, *The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha*, 181.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-119.

<sup>158</sup> AIKS, *The Speech of the Chairman Swami Sahajanand Saraswati*, 8<sup>th</sup> Session of All India Kisan Conference, Bezwada, March 14-15, 1944.

<sup>159</sup> Stephen Henningham, *Peasant Movement in Colonial India, North Bihar-1917-1942* (Canberra: ANU Printing, 1982), 166.

<sup>160</sup> Hauser, *Sahajanand*, 76.

<sup>161</sup> Hauser, *The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha*, 120.

<sup>162</sup> Das, *Agrarian Unrest*, 111.

<sup>163</sup> Alam, *Government and Politics*, 153.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Singh, “The Bihar Kisan Sabha Movement,” 27.

<sup>166</sup> *TOI*, May 16, 1938.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, January 26, 1938.

<sup>168</sup> BSA, “English recording of the speech of Swami Sahajanand, delivered at Nasirganj, Shahabad, on 18.1.1935,” File No 16 (1)/1935, in *Kisan Movements: In the Records of Bihar State Archives, Vol. I* (Patna: Directorate of Bihar State Archives, 2015), 506.

<sup>169</sup> NAI, “Prosecution of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the Kisan Sabha Leader, under the Defence of India Rules for three Objectionable speeches”, Home Political, File No 7/8/40. Poll- 1940, 24. Original Speech in Hindi: “किसानों एक मंत्र हम पढ़ेंगे। किसानों को तो असली बात में परना है असली लड़ाई लड़नी है। कहीं लाठी खाना है कहीं जुलूस निकालना है। हमारे हितैसी लोग कहेंगे जमीन निलाम हो जाएगी। लेकिन कचहरी में पैरबी करने नहीं जाएँगे। जमींदार घर का रुपया खर्च करके डिक्री करेगा, उसको लिलाम करेगा, दखलदहानी कराएगा... कागज की बेदखली में तुम मत परो। खेत में जाओ, वहां पर आग जलाओ और हर जगह देखो कहीं 144 लगा है, 107 लगा है।... खेत में नहीं दिमाग में 144, 107 है। किसान को यहीं करना है। किसान का यही सत्याग्रह है।”

<sup>170</sup> Hauser, *The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha*, 141.

<sup>171</sup> Das, “Peasants and Peasant Organisations”, 63.

<sup>172</sup> Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 370-372.

<sup>173</sup> Jitendra Kumar, *Land Reform and Peasant Resistance in Bihar: A Study of Muzaffarpur District, 1929-2000* (MPhil diss., Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2017).

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## Glossary

<i>Amin</i>	A government official who surveys on land
<i>Anna</i>	Transaction value equal to 16th part of Rupee or 1/16 Rupee
<i>Bakasht</i>	Tenant's land in the temporary possession of landlords

<i>Batai</i>	A form of leasing land for cultivation
<i>Bataidari</i>	Sharecropping
<i>Begar</i>	A type of forced labour or Free service at the landlord's house
<i>Bhaoli</i>	Rent paid in kind or cash
<i>Bigha</i>	A measure of land, approximately 10/11 of an acre in Bihar
<i>Dakhil-kharij</i>	Mutation of land in Govt. Register after purchasing land
<i>Danabandi</i>	A form of leasing land for cultivation
<i>Danda</i>	Bamboo sticks
<i>Gair-Majarua</i>	Public land
<i>Jirat</i>	A type of land
<i>Khet</i>	Land
<i>Kisan</i>	Peasant
<i>Lakh</i>	Lac or Hundred Thousand
<i>Lathials</i>	landlords' men with blackjack
<i>Mahua</i>	A fruit of <i>Madhuca longifolia</i> used for brewing liquor
<i>Mazdoor</i>	Labourers
<i>Mori</i>	A grass type of plant placed at the corner for the division of land
<i>Naik</i>	A personnel who guards the government offices
<i>Panchayat</i>	A Smallest unit of local administration consisting of some villages
<i>Patwari</i>	A government official in charge of maintaining land records
<i>Raiyat</i>	Tenants or Cultivators
<i>Raj</i>	Zamindari or Estate
<i>Sabha</i>	Assembly or organisation
<i>Salami</i>	Rent paid to landlords at the time of mutation of settlement
<i>Sammelan</i>	Conference
<i>Sanyasi</i>	A Saint
<i>Satyagraha</i>	A type of non-violent civil resistance
<i>Swami</i>	Master or Religious teacher
<i>Teen-kathia</i>	Cultivation of Indigo in at least three Katha per acre
<i>Tehsildar</i>	Collector of revenue
<i>Thana</i>	Police Station
<i>Urf</i>	Alias
<i>Zamindar</i>	Landlord