

**AGRARIAN MOBILISATION IN WESTERN UTTAR PRADESH
A CASE STUDY OF THE BHARTIYA KISAN UNION**

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DECLARATION

This dissertation entitled " Agrarian Mobilisation in Western Uttar Pradesh : A Case Study of the Bhartiya Kisan Union " submitted by Mr. Ajay Kant in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any University. We recommend that this dissertation should be placed before the examiners for their consideration for the award of M.Phil. degree.

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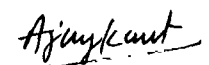
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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary mobilization of the farmers mainly on price related issues against the neglect of rural interests, have been a prominent feature of the political scene in several states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana and recently in Western Uttar Pradesh (U.P.). The movements launched by the farmers of these states has not only caught the attention of the media, but has been well sustained and has enjoyed a fairly wide support among the farmers in their respective regions.

The success of these movements have prompted political parties to give greater attention to agricultural issues in their political programmes. Today, no state government or a political party can dare to either ignore them or openly oppose their cause. Indeed, by the late 1980s, political parties, in their election campaigns, have started promising increased remunerative prices, cheaper inputs and favourable terms of trade between agriculture and industry. This has led to a considerable increase in the influence of the agrarian interests and classes in the politics and policies. This deserves a closer analysis. This dissertation is an attempt to understand the nature and character of such agrarian mobilisation since the late 1970s. It is mainly a study of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) of the western U.P. The existing poverty in rural India suggests that the poor have ample reasons to protest against their conditions and to mobilise around the forces working for a restructuring of the agrarian relations. But given the diverse historical, social, economic and political conditions of the rural areas, from time to time, a set of complex factors have played its role in mobilising the rural masses. Under the British rule, all agrarian classes were

mobilised against the colonial rulers, who were perceived as the primary enemy and its Indian agents (the Zamindars), as the secondary enemies. On the other hand, the 1950s and the 1960s were marked by the mobilisation of the rural poor by the communist parties against landlords and exploitation within the rural sector. Though this type of agrarian mobilisation still continues in some parts of the country, but today it has taken a back seat. Instead, the farmers' movements on price and related issues have dominated the Indian scene.

A general explanation to this shift in agrarian mobilisation has been that, due to the strategy of the "Green Revolution", agriculture in the states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Punjab etc. has become highly commercialised. And a rich capitalist and middle class/caste surplus producing farmers have emerged, who initially benefitted from the commercialisation of the agriculture. But in the late 1970s, their income reached a plateau. So now they are trying to rectify this through agitational politics. In this dissertation, the first chapter tries to bring out the general reason behind the mobilisation of the farmers in these states, even though, each of the states had certain specific economic, social and political conditions which shaped the nature of the mobilisation of the farmers for remunerative prices and related issues. This chapter in fact, is a background for a detailed analysis of the BKU in the following chapters.

Western UP, like Coimbatore, Nasik and Malaprabha, has a highly commercialised agriculture. By 1980-81, the percentage of the

net irrigated area to the net sown area, in the western UP, was 72.4 percent as compared to 53.6 percent in eastern UP and an average of 54.9 percent in the state¹. The consumption of fertilizers in 1980-81 was 58.5 percent (kg per hectare), was the highest as compared to other regions and an average of 47.4 percent in the state². Moreover, by 1978-79, 52.4 percent of the area was covered by the HYV cereals and other cash crops, which is the highest, as compared to the other regions of the state. But only 71.9 percent area was under food grains, which is the lowest as compared to the other regions of the state and the state average of 81.9 percent³.

But all the classes in western UP did not have access to the benefits of the Green Revolution. The greatest beneficiaries of the commercialisation and the new technology were the rich capitalist and the middle caste/class surplus producing farmers. The bulk of the holdings which are economically self-sufficient and can potentially produce surpluses, were concentrated in western UP, where only one-fourth of the holdings were in marginal category (i.e. less than a hectare, which can not produce surplus), compared to the 48.6 percent in the eastern region⁴.

Charan Singh, was the leading spokesman of agrarian interest in UP. He articulated the aspirations and demands of the emergent surplus-producing farmers. But after his death, no political party or leader was able to articulate the demands of these surplus-producing farmers of Western UP, whose initial economic benefit in the late 1970s reached a plateau. It was at this juncture that the BKU emerged. The second chapter explains the

economic and social context of the emergence of BKU, its organisational structure and documents the course of major agitations, issues raised and the government's response towards them.

The leaders of the farmers' movements have often managed to rise above the immediate local issues that provoked the agitations and have given them a larger perspective and goals needed for the movement. A movement has a class base and intends to change the conditions of those participating in it. It also has an ideology to justify it. The leaders of the farmers' movements, by posing the question of agriculture versus industry or rural Bharat versus urbane India, has been able to provide a kisan ideology to the movement. The whole of rural Bharat is perceived as one family, whose well-being is linked to the higher prices for their produce, subsidised inputs, remission of loans etc.. Chapter III, while analysing the socio-economic base of the BKU, intends to explain why the movement led by the BKU could enlist the support of even small farmers and landless agricultural labours belonging to the middle and lower castes.

METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION

Apart from the secondary data and articles published in academic journals and newspaper reports on the agitations during the last several years, I have relied on the personal discussions with several prominent leaders of the BKU and with farmers themselves at the state level as well as at the village level. This was done through a survey of 5 villages in 5 districts of Western UP.

There are about nine districts in western UP, regarded as the

strongholds of the BKU: Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Moradabad, Bijnor, Haridwar, Bulandshahar, Ghaziabad and Aligarh. Out of these nine districts, five were selected, after consultations with many workers and the district presidents of the BKU⁵. They were of the opinion that the bulk of the farmers who had actively participated in the mammoth rallies and dharanas, called by the BKU belonged to the five districts of Meerut, Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur and Bijnor.

Five villages were selected from each of the above-mentioned districts⁴. Except Gunarsi (at Saharanpur), all the four villages had some sort of organisational structure of the BKU. While selecting these villages, care was taken that it should represent all the major religions/castes and classes of the region.

In order to select a sample for the study, a household (HH)⁷ has been taken as the unit. The total number of HHs in each village was grouped (a) according to the religion and caste and (b) land holdings. Ten percent of the total HH in each village was interviewed informally in such a way that 10 percent of all the major religion/caste and landholding category were represented.

NOTES

1. Ajit Kumar Singh: Agricultural Development and Rural Poverty; Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, pp.22
2. Ibid., pp.7, as cited in State Planning Institute, Regional Disparities in UP, 1982, Directorate of Agriculture, UP and Agricultural Statistics of UP, 1978-79; 1981.
3. Ibid.
4. Agricultural census in UP, 1976, 77, pp.47, cited in Zoya Hasan: Self-Serving Guardians: Formation and Strategy of the BKU; Economic and Political Weekly, Dec.3, 1989.

5. Information based on personal interview with Choudhary Balraj Singh, President, BKU (Meerut), Major Asha Ram, President BKU unit (Muzaffarnagar), Narender Singh, BKU President, Baghra block, (Muzaffarnagar), Jitendra Pal Singh, BKU unit, Nirpura, Mr. Rajesh Kumar Singh, S.D.M., (Ghaziabad), sympathiser of BKU, Tejpal Singh, advocate (Meerut), sympathiser of BKU.
6. These villages were selected in consultation with the same persons as mentioned in the foot note 5.
7. For village Schedule, see Appendix I

FARMERS' MOVEMENTS

India is witnessing an unprecedented farmers' mobilization today, not only in its spread, but also in its content and quality, in the goals it has set for itself and in the kinds of questions it has raised. The Peasant's movements of 1950s and 1960s directed against landlordism and oppression within the rural sector are today relatively an old phenomenon. The contemporary farmers' movements are not against the oppression within the rural sector, but against what they believe to be the factors behind continuing rural underdevelopment and a relative deterioration in the incomes of the farmers. Remunerative prices for agricultural produces and non-payment of taxes and loans, therefore have become the main issues around which the farmers have agitated. The farmers' movement has attempted to show that underpricing of the agricultural produce is the chief reason for the poverty of the rural masses and therefore of the nation, thus raising the question of industry versus agriculture, or as Sharad Joshi terms it, Bharat versus India. The farmers movements have tried, though with little success, to mobilize all sectors of rural India for their cause.

The British introduced two major land revenue and tenorial systems: the Zamindari system¹ and the other was the Roytwari system. This led to the evolution of a new structure of agrarian relations that was extremely regressive. New social classes appeared at the top as well as at the bottom of the social scale.² There arose landlords, intermediaries and moneylenders at the top and tenants-at-will, share-croppers and agricultural labourers at

the bottom². As no effort was made by the colonial government to improve agricultural practices and production, the peasantry lived under a highly exploitative regime, which is evident from the famines, which had become a regular feature of rural India³. The peasants of India have, on their part, changed the orthodox understanding that they are passive, conservative category, as they fought against this exploitative system at every step. But their revolutionary potential, expressed many times in the history⁴, was suppressed with a heavy hand, by the Indian state. These peasant struggles have been categorised into different groups or periods by scholars like Kathleen Gough, D.N. Dhanagare and Uday Mehta.

Kathleen Gough after studying the aims, principles, and organisations of the peasants' movements, classified the peasants' struggles into five categories⁵. To this classification, Dhanagare has added yet another category⁶.

Uday Mehta has divided the peasant movement into three periods: (a) from 1850 to 1921 (b) from 1923 to 1946 and (c) the post-independence era⁷. What is referred to as peasants' movement during the pre-independence phase is mainly the mobilisation of agrarian classes against the British. At that point of time, the primary enemy was the colonial master and the secondary enemy were its Indian agents. Thus all sections of the rural India were mobilised against the colonial rule. After independence, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s what is labelled as peasants' movement, is largely the mobilisation of rural classes through the agrarian front organisations sponsored by different political

parties. These movements were local in their spread and the enemy was the local overlord.

The peasants' movements of the various sections of the rural poor, have developed increasingly against all the propertied classes who were the beneficiaries of the government-initiated development programmes. These movements have developed around numerous and diverse issues, prominent among which are minimum wages, security from unemployment, right over a certain share of produce, dispossession of and ejection from the land, etc.². Even though, such movements appear to have been crushed, they succeeded in stimulating social legislations for the protection of the weak and for land reforms³. These peasant movements were greatly instrumental in breaking the old feudal order and ushering in agricultural development on modern lines.

From the middle of the 1970s, the peasant movements have taken a back seat and farmers' movements on prices and related issues have dominated the Indian scene⁴. Unlike the peasants' movements, the farmers' movements are not against oppression within the rural sector, but against what they believe to be the factors behind the continuing rural under-development, and a relative deterioration in the incomes of the farmers. The farmers' agitations taking place in the various states today recognise that the poverty of the rural areas is based not on exploitation within, but from without⁵, i.e., due to the government's policies which is more in favour of urban India and her industries. Hence, they have agitated against the state and the central government for remunerative prices of agricultural products, more subsidies, reduction of electricity tariffs and

for waiver of loans. Unlike the peasant movements, the farmers' movements have taken place only in those areas where agriculture has been commercialised, and a class of surplus producing farmers have emerged. Since the political parties were unable to openly articulate the demands of this class, non-political organisations, unlike that in the 1950s and 1960s, came up to spearhead the movement in various states.

In order to tackle the agrarian problem, the Congress government legislated Zamindari-abolition laws, and a number of other measures, such as bureaucratic and administrative innovations, community development programmes etc, after independence. With the abolition of the zamindari system, either some of the zamindars were ruined or were forced to change the style of their exactions from the rural poor. Moreover, by the 1960s, the movement for tenancy reforms and tenancy occupations were over. The overall phenomenon of tenancy cultivation had dropped very sharply. As per the National Sample Survey (N.S.S.) 8th round, the leased-in area was only 20.5 percent of the operated area in 1953-54 in India, which declined further to 10.69 percent in 1961-62 (NSS, 17th round) and 10.57 percent in 1971-72 (NSS 26th round).¹² A group of tenants with permanent tenure and large occupational holdings with them emerged more powerful than they were before. Most of the well-to-do landlords either became capitalist farmers by evading land-holding ceilings, through fictitious Benami transactions and concealment or sunk gradually into the middle and lower middle classes in urban India¹³. On the other hand, the number of agricultural labourers kept

increasing in every census enumerations¹⁴.

This transformation of the nature of Indian agriculture from a predominantly feudal order to that of a pre-dominantly capitalist order, was marked by significant regional variations, more-over the capitalist order itself was not of a homogenous nature, for there developed a spectrum with landlord capitalism at the one end and peasant capitalism at the other. In between, representing a large part of the spectrum, the upper echelons of the tenancy hierarchy became the owners of the land, they had leased-in and controlled¹⁵. Hence, the strategy to make rural India egalitarian, could not be achieved, nor did the Congress under Nehru succeed in raising agricultural production through these institutional changes.

The Congress party under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, adopted an agrarian strategy, which aimed at raising agricultural production through greater investment in infrastructure, such as, technology, irrigation, fertilisers and HYV, seeds¹⁶, termed as the "Green Revolution". Studies on Green Revolution in 1970s¹⁷, have come to the conclusion that though the overall production of India had risen, but it was the large landholders who had benefitted the most from the technological developments in the agriculture. The new spurt in agricultural prosperity actually had the most positive effect on those who had benefitted from the Zamindari abolition programme and were able to retain large holdings. This middle class of farmers (possessing 5 to 15 acres) together with the large land-owners, are the net producers of the marketable surplus¹⁸. Thus, by 1971-72, this middle class was probably the most numerous and controlled more land than any

of the other three agrarian classes¹⁹. At the end of 1975, it was the economic interest of this class which was affected, as the gains incurred from the Green Revolution, tapered off²⁰. As no political party articulated the demands of this class, local agitations started in different states, where agriculture had gone up through the process of commercialisation initiated by the Green revolution. Thus, farmer's organisations came up in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana and western U.P. and by the end of 1970s, the agitations launched by them took the form of Farmers' movements. These farmers' movements, being non-political, also acted as pressure groups, both at the state as well as the national level, in order to get concessions from the government on demands such as lowering of the rates of power tariff, remunerative prices for agricultural produce, subsidised inputs in agriculture, i.e. fertilisers, seeds, pesticides etc., waiver of agricultural loans and other civic facilities in the villages.

The Green Revolution has unquestionably contributed to the rise of the rich farmers as a class with definite class interests as well as a distinct political identity. Through the green revolution strategy, important inputs such as high yielding varieties of seeds (particularly paddy and wheat), fertilizers and pesticides as well as energised wells, canals and lift-irrigation facilities were brought to the door-steps of the cultivating households of rural India²¹. To promote agricultural growth, the basic productivity of the primary producer had to be augmented without necessarily draining his already fragile resources. This

meant that the inputs had to be supplied at heavily subsidised rates. No doubt, as mentioned above, large landholders benefitted from developments in the agricultural technology more than the small holders. But, in the areas undergoing Green revolution, small holders did participate significantly in the new technology. Raj Krishna has shown at the micro-aggregative level that "though the share of the smallholders in cultivated area is only 21 percent, its share in all important inputs, namely, irrigated area, fertilizer consumption, institutional credit and total inputs, per unit of land, is more than that of large farmers, though per household, it is less" ²². Mutiah found that holders with less than 5 acres accounted for 39 percent of the cultivated area but 42 percent of the HYV area ²³. Thus Dantwala concludes that even small holdings of 2 to 3 acres which were earlier not viable became so with the adoption of HYVs and irrigation ²⁴. Notwithstanding, such use of the new technology by small-holders, most of the inputs for modernisation of farm production require large capital investments which were and are even now, beyond the means of small and marginal farmers, who constitute an over-whelming majority in the rural India ²⁵. What is true of farm inputs is even doubly true of agricultural credits. A great bulk of institutional credit was cornered by rich farmers, through their political linkages, patronage and protection. Though the nationalisation of major commercial banks in 1969 had eased the situation slightly for the poor and marginal sections, rural credit sources continued to be as inaccessible as before. Consequently, only a tiny class of rich and middle class farmers, became the principle beneficiaries of

development. In fact, the policy and practise of rural development differed widely as agricultural development was reduced to euphemism for using public funds to serve the interests of a handful of rich farmers²⁶. The green revolution resulted in the growth of production of the food-grains on the one hand, it also increased the socio-economic inequalities in rural India on the other²⁷.

This class of well-off farmers, could easily dominate the countryside, not only because they employed labourers and offered credit to the small peasants and labourers, but also because of the caste advantage in many regions. Therefore, in a country with a dominant rural population and adult franchise, the political power base had to be broadened to accommodate this rural elite. Panandikar and Sud have analysed the changes in the distribution of members of the ruling parties in terms of their occupational status and found that among all occupational groups, the agriculturalists alone have steadily increased their representations, forming now, the most dominant group²⁸. They observed, therefore, that the trend is the clear indication of the political process, unleashed through free and democratic parliamentary elections which has started bringing about a major transfer of political power from the westernised and the urban political elite to the rural classes²⁹. When rural power and influence have grown, as shown above, the situation can be said to have matured the situation for them to organise to promote the economic interests of this class, more aggressively than before. This is what Byres asserts, as having taken place³⁰.

Although agricultural growth is visible in the rise in food-production from about 45 to 50 million tons in the pre-green revolution days to about 150 million tons today,, the farm prices have not kept pace with the agricultural production²¹. Taking the period from 1960-61 to 1973-74, agricultural prices have increased at an average annual rate of 7.7 percent per annum, but slowed down to 4 percent per annum during the subsequent period (1973-74 to 1981-82); on the other hand, the non-agricultural prices, which increased by 5.8 percent per annum during the former period, increased to 7.7 percent per annum during the subsequent period²². Moreover, the contribution of the agricultural sector to the national economy, as a whole, has steadily declined, and according to the Agricultural Price Commission (APC), the price-index for the agricultural products as a percentage of the price of manufactured goods declined from 100.7 in 1974 to 83.5 in March 1980²³.

The agrarian economy linked to the wider political economy via the market could not have possibly escaped certain contradiction--particularly between those who want raw materials and food produced in farms supplied at cheaper rates to certain industries and consumers, and those farmers who want remunerative prices for as to cover their production costs and leave them some margins of profit. Hence the whole issue of terms of trade between agriculture and industry has become significant. The farmers whose income has tapered off and also for those who have already adopted HYVs think that their only source of maintaining their income is through stable out-put input price ratios, assuming stable output in agricultural products. Nadkarni

therefore regards it as a crisis in agriculture which the farmers hope to resolve through agitating for price, demands and other concessions.³⁴

The farmer movements on these issues, particularly on non party lines, can be said to have originated in Tamil Nadu. They began first in Tanjavur district.³⁵ The rich landowners under the leadership of Raja Gopal Naidu of this district formed an association in 1949, to counter the tenent movements organised by the communist parties. The organisation gradually died out due to suppression of the CFI.³⁶ It was revived in 1975. The increasing labour activities, united all the caste union. The initiative of organising came from the large farmers, but the small farmers were also drawn into struggle.³⁷ As Tanjuvar is dominated by paddy, a subsistence crop, the farmers' movement receded into the background and a much more commercialised area with a dominance in cash crop took the lead.

Coimbtore had special features which made it more sensitive to the above mentioned factors necessary for farmer movements. One of these factors is that the district has a large proportion of area under large holdings i.e., holding expected to generate a net marketable surplus. In 1970-1971, the operational holding above 5 acres accounted for 42.4 percent of all holding, and controlled 80.2 percent of area. In the state as whole, such holding accounted for only 21.3 percent of all holdings and controlled 62.9 percent. As such, surplus holders dominate in the district both in number and area.³⁸ Moreover Nadkarni, found that even small holders in this district are exposed to the market as reflected in the proportion of their gross sale to out-

put. In terms of this proportion they were found to be no less commercialised than the larger farmers.³⁹ Though Coimbatore has a higher degree of industrial development thus relieving the pressure on agriculture compared with other states, but the work force in agriculture remained stagnant in the seventies. Above all, the ratio of per worker income in agriculture to non-agriculture income per worker declined from 0.461 in 1970-71 to 0.308 at current prices and 0.303 at 1970-71 prices in 1979-80 in the state⁴⁰. Since due to the commercialisation of agriculture and greater development of the cash economy meant that a crash in prices or in the output of the farmer-cum-small entrepreneur can upset their economy gravely, and this is what seems to have happened in the mid seventies .

Maharashtra had similar condition, when farmers' movement on price took place there. Though green revolution was late to come but by 1972-73 things began to change, therefore a growth in yield per hectare set-in overcoming the previous stagnation and the use of modern inputs increased even in the case of crops other than sugar cane. Like Coimbatore, Maharashtra's economy as a whole is very diversified, considering the share of non agricultural sector in income which was 75 percent in 1980-81, the share of agriculture in state domestic product GDP (in constant) has steadily declined from 40 percent in 1960-61 to 27.0 percent in 1970-71 and 25.4 percent in 1980-81 . But the work force however is not as diversified as income, though the share of agriculture in it has declined from 69.9 percent in 1961 to 64.8 percent in 1971 and to 61.6 percent in 1981.⁴¹ This has made the ratio of

agricultural income per worker to non agricultural income very unfavorable in the state as compared with the country as a whole .

Farmers' movement in Karnataka on the new issues came into prominence only with the Malaprobha agitation in 1980. The Malaprobha area had been a part of chronically drought prone region, where farmers traditionally raised mostly one crop in a year either jawar or short staple cotton, with their own inputs. Into this traditional agriculture irrigation was introduced in 1973-74 and the farmers were involved in the cash economy. They were encouraged to grow Varalakshmi a long staple cotton and also hybrid varieties of jawar under light irrigation using costly seeds, fertilisers and pesticides from the market. As cotton prices were quite high at that time it appealed to the farmers to adopt new varieties and their hopes soared high. What broke them was the subsequent crash in the price of cotton followed soon by a steep rise in fertiliser prices.⁴² To make the situation worst a betterment levy with retrospective effect values in irrigation was imposed by government. The amount involved apart, what caused resentment was that a farmer had to pay the levy for all his land once it was in a command area even though only a part of his holding was irrigated.⁴³ Therefore to ventilate these grievances the Malaprabha Nuravari Pradesh Ryota Samanvaya Samiti (Malaprabha Command Area Farmers Coordination Committee) was formed in March 1980, on a party basis involving prominent local leaders belonging to various parties, which gradually spread to other irrigated areas and by August 1980 Ryota Sanghas were active in Shimoga, Belgaum, Bijapur and

Bellary districts.⁴⁴

The situation in Punjab is obviously different from that in Maharashtra or in Karnataka. The Punjab farmers are much better off in terms of stability in prices. Market infrastructure has developed to a greater extent in Punjab and is relatively favorable to farmers. The Punjab agitation took place not because the farmers were poor or had not gained in absolute terms--they might have even gained in relative terms, compared with agricultural labourers--but because they did not gain in relation to non--agricultural income which they could clearly observe.

Initially the relative income must have significantly increased particularly in the case of rich farmers, who adopted HYVs but gradually the farmers who had already adopted them, as well as the recommended dosage of inputs, found that not only were their incomes relatively stagnant but the incomes of those who were hitherto poorer were catching up with their own.⁴⁵ As this process became wider involving more and more farmers, they had to seek other means of increasing their income including the demand of remunerative prices, through organised agitations.

Other than this there was indeed an objective basis for discontent among the Punjab farmers. The increasing prosperity as mentioned above during the sixties seems to have encountered a reversal during the seventies. The rates of return on cultivation of wheat declined sharply from about 20 percent in the early seventies to a mere 4 percent during 1975-76, it improved to 12 percent by 1978-79 but could not regain their earlier level.⁴⁶ While the cost increased sharply partly due to

stagnant yields, prices did not rise proportionally. As in the country as a whole, so also in Punjab, the terms of the trade moved against agriculture during the seventies. The proportion of the work-force in agriculture (cultivators and agricultural labours) actually increased from 55.9 to 62.7 percent , but declined a little to 59.2 percent, in 1981.⁴⁷ The proportion of income from agriculture (including livestock) which was 60 percent in 1976-77, declined in 1980-81 to 53 percent. The ratio of agricultural income per worker to non agricultural income, which was 0.890 in 1971 indicating a close parity, declined in 1981 to 0.783. This decline in relative income in real terms was further accentuated by relative prices, indicating a relative decline in purchasing power of agriculture.⁴⁸

With an example set by the farmers movements in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, and a growing awareness, that the farmers can negotiate with the government more successfully, through a non-political and non-communal organization, the Punjab, Khetibari Zamindari Union (KZU) was therefore formed in 1977, to fight for higher procurement prices for wheat and concession in inputs.⁴⁹ The Punjab KZU converted itself into the Punjab unit of the BKU in 1980.⁵⁰

All these reverse trends in agriculture, created the condition, for the rise of the farmers movements in all these states, but what actually agitated and galvanised the farmers to form non-political organisations was the role of bureaucracy and the politicians both at the states and at the central level.

The bureaucracy therefore in all these regions became the target



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of the fury of farmers. This was not merely because they were the proximate manifestations of the government, but also because of the way they played thier role. The scope for bribery could be immense in newly irrigated areas subjcated to the development pressures and irrigation levies. Nothing could be done in the area, without a handsome bribe, be it purchasing seeds, fertilisers, getting compansation for land acquired or receiving loans.⁵⁰ Even where they may not have been corrupt they seemed to have been indifferent to the problems of farmers. They percieved their duty more in terms of mechanical obedience to written government directives rather than in terms of showing initiative to understand their role in the development of a region.

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Nor were the political parties and politicians at the states or national level ,able to articulate the grievances of the rich and middle class, farmers of these regions. The rise of these movments therefore, has been attributed to the growing political isolation of such rural elite for instance the DMK , which came to power in Karnataka in 1967, started subversion of institutions like the Panchayats, cooperatives, and even temple committees, where the local elite had a chance to assert themselves.,This process continued even under ADMK, which came to power in 1977.⁵¹ Whereas in Karnataka, the local M.L.A.s did little to promopte a proper understanding of the problems of the region. They were on the sidelines during the agitation and often played no role either for or against.⁵² If the elected representatives had nothing to do with what was happening in their constituencies, even the elected political leadership at a higher level* failed to do so . It played no role* either in

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understanding local issues and seeking solution to them or in making the farmers understand their own role in water management and in paying ,legitimate dues to the government. The communication links appeared almost to have been snapped completely. But unlike Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, in Punjab there has been always a rapport between the BKU and the Akali Dal. This is not only because the common target of thier attack has been the central government and the ruling party the congress(I). Gill and Singhal have observeed their economic demands too are identical, and both have the same class base. Both want more power to the states, so that the rich peasantry can then use the government power at the state level, to promote its interest and make a better bargain with the monopoly bourgeoisie.⁵³

Farmers of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Punjab felt let down by the government on economic administrative and political front. The farmers in these states came up wth non political organisation with local leaders, to put pressure on government, in favour of their demands. Though demands in all the states centred around renumerative prices, for agricultural produce, lowering of electricity tariff and concession in inputs. But it also differed from state to state; for instance the Tamil Nadu agricultural association (TNAA) under the leadership on Narayanaswamy Nadu ⁵⁴ started its agitation on two issues (a)elctricity charges (b) repayment of government loans and a major spur in the movement came with the increase in electricity tariff in 1970 ,from 8.25 to 10 paise per unit . Apart from reduction in electricity tariff the TNNA demanded remission of

cooperative, government and private loans incurred by farmers, extension of credit under a new credit policy, fixation of agricultural prices on basis of cost of production and input prices, adequate supply of electricity, diesel oil, fertiliser and other inputs, establishment of rural service centre to repair agricultural machinery and equipments, abolition of agricultural income tax on commercial crops, and provision of crop and cattle insurance.⁵⁵;

The government postponed the solution by appointing a committee; on the other hand during 1976, the electricity rates were further raised to 16 paise per unit; and a fixed charge on pump sets was also imposed. By 1976 TNAA was again on the war path. To their earlier demands they added a few more and one of them was to please the agricultural labourers - asking government to provide free houses and to provide them with consumer goods at subsidised rates, and the other was payment of subsidies at the rate of RS.1000/ acre to encourage farming.⁵⁴ Actually Naidu had realised that success of his movement lies in developing a mass base involving small farmers and agricultural labourers by making them realise that their prosperity was linked with that of the farmers. The agitation thus in 1978 received massive response and even took a violent turn, involving not only non payment of taxes and loan arrears but also state wise bundhs, blocking of traffic, destruction of bridges, forced removal of security from cooperative societies and gherao of bank staff. A limited settlement was arrived in 1978 resulting in reduction of electricity tariff, meter rent, and abolition of cess in each crops. But the government refused to waive loan arrears, withdraw

prosecution against more than a thousand person charged with violence or to settle other demands. Not satisfied Naidu launched another agitation in 1979 and thretened to stop supplies of milk , vegitables and other agricultural produce to towns and cities.⁵⁷ But a dissident openion was growing among those advocated a moderate line. Gradually the movement weaken Meamwhile the government led by M.G.Ramachandran decided to further reduce the electricity rate for small farmers and to write off their over due loans , overdues of big farmers was rescheduled. But the leaders of the movement protested that this discrimination was an attempt to divide the movement, MGR quiped with great insight that the secret behind the rich farmers call for the non repayment of credit and their demand for blanket writing off overdues was to see that the flow of the institutional credit to small farmer was stoped so that they become dependent on the rich farmers. The chief minister thus charged that the land ownig class was making a determined bid to bring back the golden days of feudal land lordism.⁵⁸ Hence with one move MGR could erode the mass support of the movement. Naidu tried to resurrect his association by organising it as an all India party, renaming it as Indian Farmers and Toilers Party. The party contested a by election to parliament in which it lost heavily. Most of the political parties still have farmer wing in the states but as an independent force out side the political party system, farmers movement today does not appear to be in sight.⁵⁹

M.V.Nadkarni therefore concluded though such was the fate of the

movement in Tamil Nadu it left an undeliable impact much beyond the state boundaries and it could be said to have provided inspiration to similar movements by farmers on non party lines. Even minor details of the movements were imitated. If farmer lobbies became powerful in seventies and eighties, good part of the credit should go to Naidu and his movement. In this process movement elsewhere inherited the weakness as well of his movement.⁶⁰

The farmer movement in Karnataka began a bit later than in Tamil Nadu. It took aggressive turn when by August 1980 Royata Sangha became active in Shimoga , Belgaum ,Bijapur and Bellary districts. But before this the Nnavalgund Samiti submitted a memorandum to the chif minister, Gundu Rao in April 1980. Presenting a comprehensive picture of farmers problem. The memorandum demanded a more rational and systematic management of irrigaton feeder channels, proper drainmage, free land leveling for,small farmer expedite compensation for land acquired by government for cannals, a crop insuarance scheme ,remunerative price for farm products, fixing a minimum price of Rs. 500 to Rs.800 per quintal for cotton depending on the count, other steps to prevent a price crash. ,such as monopoly purchase by government of commercial crops like cotton and to protect farmers from exploitation by middle men and monopoly capital provision of agicultural inputs at reasonable and stable price, nationalisation of textiles, jute, sugar and chemical industries, extension of rural credit on a wider scale, debt relief to those farmers who have suffered from , price crash or crop loses, abolition of betterment levy and reduction in water

rate, fix duty of water rate on area actually irrigated and not the size of total holding, and elimination of fast spreading weeds -parthanium and Bellsri joti.⁴¹ The memo warned that if the farmer problem continued to be neglected, they would launch a relentless struggle.

Finding no effective response the farmers launched a satyagraha in Nargand which completed four weeks, then rallies to enforce bandh and close Tahsildar office which had a massive response. The police resorted to firing and in Nargund a rayat and a sub-inspector was killed in a clash. These events led to agitation all over Karnataka, which continued for about a month.⁴² The wide spread support of farmers movement compelled the chief minister Gundu Rao to announce a few concessions on 30 July 1980 in the form of interim relief costing Rs. 85 crores to the government.⁴³

The farmers of the Malaprabha command area were by no means satisfied, on the other hand farmers from other region got stimulus from Malaprabha agitation. The Ryota sanghas of Simoga, Belgaum, Bijapur, Bellary and Dhadwad districts in a joint meeting on 11th August came out with 19 demands being common to farmers. An unconditional release of all the arrested agitators was naturally the first in the new draft. But the more interesting development was the clever enunciation of principle for determining agricultural prices. It was made clear that agriculture could not be treated as merely a family enterprise, it had to be treated as commercial units, as an industry and man-hours spent in agriculture had to be taken into account. In

the process earlier emphasis on market reforms, monopoly purchase by government, to break the exploitive middle man and even in the need for distribution of essential goods was sacrificed. The special problem of agriculture labourers and the need for preferential treatment of small farmers were ignored, but later to get their support these were included. In several ways this meetings was a transition point. It marked the change of emphasis from area specific issues to more general issue concerning farmers. Nadakarni while analysing these demands, concludes that it also marked a transition from an ideology which was anti monopoly and anti private trade, to an ideology of ruralism ←←

Instrumental in bringing about this transition was the entry of three persons, Nanjenda-swamy, Rudrappa and Sundaresh, who later emerged as the leaders of the Karnataka Rajya Rajota Sangha (KRRS). By October 1980, they spread their movement in at least 12 out of 19 districts,^{65,44} and a greater clarity was imparted to price issues.⁶⁶ Whereas the problems of agricultural labourers which were ignored earlier, were now attended to. However, there was no direct mention of the need to raise minimum wages for farm labourers and no assurance, that they would be implemented. Like the leaders of Tamil Nadu, and in Karnataka also, they did not view the problem of wages seriously, maintaining that once remunerative prices were paid to agriculture farm wages, and employment would automatically improve. But inclusion of these demands, was in response to the widespread criticism of the class basis of the farmers movements and to show that the farmers movement were concerned with the rural sector as a whole.

Gundu Rao government announced immediate acceptance of 12 out of 19 demands of farmers and promised consideration of the other demands for which concurrence with the Center and the RBI was needed. The major thrust of concessions went in the favour of sugar cane growers, reflecting clearly the greater pressure from the KRRS and Gundu Rao's congress to placate them. There indeed was a significant gains for farmers in respect of prices. But the problem of insecurity of prices - above the support levels and the need for market reforms was however, hardly attended to in depth either by farmers or the government. Thus on the one hand a few press reporters and others interpreted it as a bonanza for farmers⁴⁷ or a surrender to them on the other hand a few closer to farmer's view have interpreted it as holding out no gain for them.

The rise of the KRRS as a strong alternative force among farmers, made the left democratic political parties like congress(i) CFI, CPI(M) and Lok Dal to organise themselves into a Progressive Democratic Front (PDF) at the political level and constituted a farmers organisation-- Karnataka Prantu Ryota Sangha (KPRS)⁴⁸ to meet the challenge of what they considered as Kulak movement. But the KRRS did not want farmers movement to be led by political parties at all. The rift between two mainstreams of farmers movements thus came into open, and from then on, there was to be a relentless competition between the two.

Like in Tamil Nadu the KRRS in the 1984 Lok Sabha election, fielded its candidates which proved to be disastrous, as all its

candidates lost their deposits. Though the KRRS had contested only in a few places where it had a base and had earlier launched agitations.⁴⁹ But this does not mean that the KRRS, consisted of farmers with marketable surplus had no hold on votes or rural power. Consciously or not these farmers were making use of both institutions the parliamentary framework through political parties who could form the government (KRRS had no such chance) and also the KRRS for agitational politics.

It was Sharad Joshi, the leader of Shetkari Sangathana in Maharashtra, who gave a clear cut ideology to the farmers movement. His diagnosis of rural problem is in terms of price issues, to an extent that his is called a one-point programme for remunerative prices for farm produce, "Which according to him will set in motion all the required forces towards the removal of poverty in the country .⁷⁰ S.Joshi has propounded a Bharat vs India (i.e. agriculture Bharat vs Urban India) theory based on the premise that however rich a farmer may be as a farmer he is still much poorer than people in urban areas. However the Indian elites have conspired to divide Bharat in big, medium and small farmers. But there is no line of contradiction between the big and the small with regards to remunerative prices.⁷¹

Joshi started with a campaign in his taluk for remunerative price for onions in 1979, which spread also to Nasik district. This area contributes to the bulk of countries onion output. In 1979-80 when the onion agitation was at progress in Nasik district onion was selling at 50 paise a kilo in the district whereas the retail price in the cities like Bombay, Delhi and other places, was over two rupees a kilo.⁷² To broaden the base

of his movement, Joshi also at the same time took up the cause of sugar cane growers in the district. He demanded a price per quintal of Rs. 50 to Rs. 70 in dry season and Rs. 100 in rainy season for onion and, Rs. 300, a tonne for sugar cane (at 10 percent recovery). The massive response he got from farmers sent ripples all over Maharashtra. His organisation, Shetkari Sangathan (Farmers Association) became a household name. As a result the government increased the prices of both onion and sugar cane, which came fairly close to what was demanded.⁷³ Meanwhile Joshi's attention was drawn towards the beedi (tobacco) cultivators in Nipani in Karnataka, bordering with Maharashtra. The growers had only internal market to sell to and were in the grip of rapacious merchants. The price fell quite low in 1980. Joshi found that "growers received less than six Rs. a kilo as against the production cost of more than Rs. 12. On the other hand the traders sold the stuff at double the production cost."⁷⁴

The state government avoided the price issue on the ground that only the center could fix support prices for tobacco but it offered help to growers in forming a cooperative, to overcome the exploitative private trade. Joshi demanded monopoly procurement by the state as the growers were too weak to form the cooperative, which was not acceptable to the government. Though, prices paid were somewhat higher after the agitation tobacco growers continued to be in the grip of private trade and the agitation failed.⁷⁵

But Sharad Joshi realised the limitation of continuing

agitation for higher prices within a state. " Now we have to look beyond the boundaries of Maharashtra. For example if you want to get (higher) price for ground nut we can not succeed till we have solid contacts with Tamil Nadu and Gujarat; for cotton contacts with Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and even Punjab are necessary. So now time has come for farmers in different corners of the country to come together."⁷⁶

He turned his attention to Punjab, whose all crops including wheat are commercialised, thus minimising the chance of contradiction⁷⁷. Among the farmers movement, Punjab has a distinctive feature of involving non political leaders of farmers from other states and project a national image of their movements.⁷⁸

As elsewhere in Punjab also, the major thrust has been on higher prices of agricultural output and supply of inputs at concessional rates, resistance to recovery of loans and canal lining expenses, fight against increase in electricity tariff, and bureaucratic corruption. But as elsewhere the BKU of Punjab has also tried to take up some issues of general interest to enlist the support of other rural sections i.e. improvement of rural infrastructure, reservation for rural areas, in professional and other educational institution, industrialisation of rural areas etc. ⁷⁹

But the Punjab BKU, started its agitational politics on February 26, 1981 for higher milk prices, in Ferozpur district.⁸⁰ The state government did increase the price of the milk, but it was not acceptable to the farmers. In February 1981 the BKU launched another agitation for the replacement of defective Universal 445

tractors. Due to their agitation the further sale of these tractors in Punjab was stopped and the tractor company was ordered to repair the already sold tractors to the satisfaction of the farmers. But it was the week long gherao of Punjab Governor's Raj Bhavan, in March 1984, for the reduction in the rate of electricity tariff, which brought the Union into lime light.²¹

The above discussion on the demands and agitation, thus shows that the class base of the Punjab farmer leaders is hardly in doubt. Small farmer are commercialised in Punjab and have a markatable surplus due to higher productivity, they have become member of the BKU, which is led and dominated by rich farmers as in other states. According to Gill and Singhal nearly 80 percent of the leaders own more than 11 acres of land, 95 percent have electric tube wells and 68 percent have tractors. They have been beneficiaries of Green Revolution, as well as government concession, 29 percent leaders have indebtedness of more than Rs. 10000 and their borrowing is mostly from cooperative institution.²² Hence it is not surprising that agitations have centred on electricity charges, apart from remunerative prices, in Punjab also. In other states the farmer movement under the non political organisation have increased the power of rich and middle class farmers vis-a-vis agricultural labourer, Gill and Singhal have cited instances where leader of Punjab KZU had earlier taken and the BKU is now taking ruthless steps "to teach a lesson" to the protesting agricultural labourers.²³

In a way, though farmer movements in all these states started

with different issues, and had their own different course. But it took place wherever, commercialisation and capitalism has penetrated agriculture under the strategy of the Green Revolution. With the Green Revolution a new class of surplus producing rich and middle class farmer emerged. The economic and political condition of this rich and middle class farmers, therefore in all these regions, where Green Revolution had commercialised the agriculture, was such that non political organisation emerged, with local leaders who through agitational politics tried to extract more concession from the government by demanding remunerative prices and more subsidies in inputs. They evolved an ideology of rural Bharat against urban India to mobilise all sections of the rural India, for their cause. But in the course of their movement, the class character of the leader and their demands became clear, thus cutting the mass support of the movements. Hence now they have turned to adopt populist demands, and forge an all India alliance to influence the central government through their economic and political clout in pursuing their demands.

NOTES

1. Later a modified version of the same zamindari system was introduced in North India under the name of Mahalwari system.
2. see, Bipin Chandra, Amlesh Tripathi, Barun De: FREEDOM STRUGGLE, N.B.T., New Delhi 1983; pp.18.
3. see Bhawani Sen: Evolution of Agrarian Relations in India including a study of the nature and consequences of post-Independence Agrarian Relations; New Delhi, 1976, p.121.
Famine broke out in India during 1771, 1803, 1818-19, 1825-26, 1832, 1869, 1876, 1877-78, 1881-91, 1896, 1899, 1906, 1907, etc..
4. There is a long and fairly well recorded history of peasant movements in India, when peasants rebelled against the colonial rulers and feudal lords, see A.R. Desai (ed.) Peasant Struggles in India; Delhi, Oxford University Press (OUP), 1979. D.N. Dhanagare, Peasant Movement in India, 1920-50; O.U.P., Delhi, 1983. Kathleen Gough: "Peasant Resistance and Revolt in South India", Pacific Affairs, vol. XII (4), 1968-69 and also her present uprisings, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.9 (special number), August 1974. K.C. Alexander, Peasant Organisation in South India, Indian Social Institute, N. Delhi, 1981. Sunil Sen: "Peasant Movement in India, mid 19th and 20th centuries. Bagchi and Co., Calcutta, 1982. Ranjit Guha: Elementary aspects of Peasant insurgency in Colonial India. Delhi, O.U.P., 1983.
5. Kathleen Gough: "Indian Peasant Uprisings, E.P.W., vol-9, No.32-39, August 1974, pp. 1391-1401.
6. D.N. Dhanagare, op. cit., p.215.
7. Uday Mehta: "Peasant Movement in India" in A.R. Desai (ed.): Peasant Struggle in India, Delhi, O.U.P., 1982, p.743.
8. A.R. Desai (ed.): Agrarian Struggles in India after Independence, Delhi, O.U.P., 1986, p.8.
9. see P.C. Joshi: land Reforms in India, Trends and Prospects, N. Delhi, Allied, 1979, pp.90.
10. M.V. Nadkarni: Farmers Movement in India, 1987, Allied Publishers, N. Delhi, pp. VII
11. Girish Sahasrabudhi: The New Farmers Movement in Maharashtra, in Sunil Sahasrabudhi (ed.) Peasant Movement Today; Asish Publications, New Delhi, 1986, pp. XV.

12. see M.V. Nadkarni, op.cit., p.25
13. Dipankar Gupta: "Country-Town nexus and Agrarian Mobilisation--BKU as an instance", EPW, December 17, 1988, p.2690.
14. see M.V. Nadkarni, op.cit., pp.33
15. ibid.,pp.23
16. Indradeep Sinha:"Development of Agricultural Productions and Agrarian Relations During The Seventies", in Y.V. Krishna Rao and others(ed.) Peasant Farming and Growth of Capitalism in Indian Agriculture, Vijayawada, 1984, p.165.
17. For example Francim Frankel in India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs, O.U.P., 1982. Biplab Das Gupta"The New Agrarian Technology and India", Macmillan, N.Delhi, 1977. R.K. Sharma: "Green Revolution ~~India Farm to Employment-India Agricultural Sector Experiences~~ in Journal 1984; G.S.Bhalla:"Agrarian Movement and Agrarian Change in India" in "Social Scientist", Vol.11, No..8, August 1983.
18. For a detailed of the evidence of positive relationship between size of holdings and marketable surplus in India, see section 4 on Agrarian Marketable surplus in M.V. Nadkarni:Marketable Surplus and Market Dependence in a Millet Region, New Delhi, Allied, 1980. pp.25-37.
19. Middle farmers represented 34% of agricultural households in 1971-72 operating about half the cultivable land. see Lioye I. Rodolph and Susanne Rudolph:"Determinants and Varieties of Agrarian Mobilisation" in Meghanand Desai, S.H. Rudolph, Ashok Rudra (ed.)Agrarian Power and Agricultural Productivity in South Asia, p.311-322.
20. Biplab Das Gupta,op.cit.;pp.20.
21. see A.R.Desai:Changing Profile of Rural Society in India, Bombay,1985.
22. Raj Krishna:"Small Farm Developmant" as cited in Rudolph and Rudolph:"In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State", University fo Chicago Press, 1987,pp.339.
23. C.Mutiah:"The Green Revolution: Participation by Small and Large Farmers",Indian Journal of Agricultural Economy; Jan.-Mar., 1971, pp.57-58. Bhalla and G.K. Chadha:"Green Revolution and Small Peasants", Economic and Political Weekly, May 15, 1982, documents similer cropping pattern for large and small farmers in Punjab, except in cotton.
24. see M.C. Dantwala: "From Stagnation to Growth", Indian

12. see M.V. Nadkarni, op.cit., p.25
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14. see M.V. Nadkarni, op.cit., pp.33
15. ibid.,pp.23
16. Indradeep Sinha:"Development of Agricultural Productions and Agrarian Relations During The Seventies", in Y.V. Krishna Rao and others(ed.) Peasant Farming and Growth of Capitalism in Indian Agriculture, Vijayawada, 1984, p.165.
17. For example Francim Frankel in India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs, O.U.P., 1982. Biplab Das Gupta"The New Agrarian Technology and India", Macmillan, N.Delhi, 1977. R.K. Sharma: "Green Revolution ~~India Farm Employment - A Study in Bihar~~ India Farm Employment - A Study in Bihar in J&S, 1984; G.S.Bhalla:"Agrarian Movement and Agrarian Change in India" in "Social Scientist", Vol.11, No..8, August 1983.
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20. Biplab Das Gupta,op.cit.;pp.20.
21. see A.R.Desai:Changing Profile of Rural Society in India, Bombay,1985.
22. Raj Krishna:"Small Farm Developmant" as cited in Rudolph and Rudolph:"In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State", University fo Chicago Press, 1987,pp.339.
23. C.Mutiah:"The Green Revolution: Participation by Small and Large Farmers",Indian Journal of Agricultural Economy; Jan.-Mar., 1971, pp.57-58. Bhalla and G.K. Chadha:"Green Revolution and Small Peasants", Economic and Political Weekly, May 15, 1982, documents similer cropping pattern for large and small farmers in Punjab, except in cotton.
24. see M.C. Dantwala: "From Stagnation to Growth", Indian

Economic Journal, vol. 18(2), Oct.-Dec., 1970; p.182.

25. G.S. Bhaalla and G.K. Chadha, op.cit., pp.47-49.
26. see Satya Dev: "The National Seed Project in India", The Journal of Administration Overseas, (19), 4th Oct., pp.262-69, as cited in D.N. Dhanagare: "An apoliticist populism"; Seminar, Dec.1988, No.352, pp.29.
27. D.N. Dhanagare: "Green Revolution and Social Inequalities in Rural India"; EPW annual No. 1987 (22), 19-21, pp. AN 137-44
28. see Liloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne H. Rudolph: "Determinants and Varieties of Agrarian mobilisation" in Desai, Rudra etc.(ed.) Agrarian Power and Agricultural Productivity in South Asia, pp.321.
29. V.A. Fai, Panandikar and Arun Sud: Changing Political Representation in India; New Delhi, Utpal Pub., 1983, pp.57,59.
30. T.J. Byres : "The New Technology class formation and class action in Indian countryside", in Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 8(4), July 1981.
31. Pradip Bose: "Formalizations", Seminar 267, (Peasants and Prices), November 1981, pp.58-62.
32. M.V. Nadkarni: "Farmers' Movements in India", Allied, New Delhi, 1987, pp.172.
33. "Farmers Agitations", The Times of India, Dec. 20, 1980. Except for 1951-52, the index was adverse to agriculture for 12 years (until 1963-64), ranging from 89.10 in 1955 to 100 in 1960-61. Starting in 1964-65, the index became favourable to agriculture reaching a high of 134.13 in 1973-74, but declined thereafter.
34. M.V. Nadkarni, op.cit., pp.165-166.
35. A detailed account has been given by K.C. Alexander: Peasant Organisations in South India, Social Institute, New Delhi, 1981, chapter 5.
36. ibid., pp.122.
37. ibid., pp.137.
38. M.V. Nadkarni, op.cit., pp.63.
39. This was found from a field-study conducted in a district, in 1979, by M.V. Nadkarni; see M.V. Nadkarni: "Socio-economic conditions in drought-prone districts of A.P., Karnataka and Tamilnadu; vol.II, ISEC Memo 1882 as cited in M.V. Nadkarni, op.cit. pp63.

40. Nadkarni explains that the industries in this district are dependent on the state of agriculture, which itself has been relatively stagnant. In 1971-72, 47% of its work force was dependent on agriculture, and in 1981, they were almost the same at 46.9%. Tamilnadu as a whole has an ever greater proportion dependent on agriculture-- 61.7% in 1971 and 60.8% in 1981. *ibid.*, p.64.
41. *ibid.*, pp.63.
42. *ibid.*, pp.70.
43. The price of Varalakshmi cotton which rated at Rs.1000 a quintal in 1974-75, came down to Rs. 350 in 1979-80. See "Varalakshmi: A bad dream now", Daily Hindu, 29 July 1980.
44. "Malaprabha to Ghataprabha:Levy for nobody's betterment"; Indian Express, Oct.11, 1980.
45. *ibid.*
46. G.S. Bhalla and G.K.Chaddha, *op.cit.*, p.872.
47. M.V. Nadkarni, *op.cit.*, pp.79.
48. *ibid.*, pp.80.
49. *ibid.*
50. As per the account given by Sucha Singh Gilland K.C. Singhal: "Rajput Farmers' Agitation", EPW, 6 Oct. 1984, p.1729.
51. This a report from a journalist who visited the Malaprabha command area soon after the July Agitation in Karnataka. See Hindu, 8 Aug., 1980.
52. Indian Express(Madras), 5 Oct. 1980.
53. "Where were they?" Hindu, 29 July, 1980.
54. Gill and Singhal, *op.cit.*, pp. 1732.
55. It was started in 1966 in North Coimbatore talluk, which was converted into a district level organisation in 1967 and a state level in 1973. It tried to be an all India organisation too under the name of Indian Farmers' Association. For further details see M.S.S. Pandaya:"Discerning the rural poor", Mainstream, 21 June 1980.
56. *ibid.*, pp.11

57. ibid., pp.12
58. ibid.
59. The Hindu, 26 Dec. 1980.
60. M.V. Nadkarni, op.cit., pp. 67.
61. ibid. pp.90, 91
62. ibid. pp.93.
63. ibid. pp.94, 95.
64. ibid. pp.97.
65. The Indian Express Editorial, 14 Oct. 1980.
66. For a detailed list of demands and the responses of the government, see M.V. Nadkarni, op.cit., pp. 100-110.
67. H. Kusumakan: "Karnataka Farmers' Harvest Bonanza", The Times of India, 24 Oct. 1980.
68. But the farmers organisations under the respective parties which were affiliated to all-Indian organisations such as the AIKS and the FFI, kept their identity separate.
69. The KRRS has developed a mass base only in about one-fourth of the state, and it came to the forefront of the states public life only because of its agitational politics. See the interview with Nanjundaswamy, published in Sunday, 1-7 April 1984, p.31.
70. As interpreted in an interview to D.B. Khadi , D.Hindu 15, March 1981
71. Express Magazine Feb. 21, 1988, see also 'Farmers are agitating about betrayal .' Sharad Joshi in Surya India October 1989, pp.48-53
72. D. Hindu, interview, op.cit.
73. As reported in New Wave, 14 April 1981, p. 5
74. ibid.
75. ibid.
76. see interview to Devinder Sharma, Express Magazine, 9 January, 1983
77. Sharad Joshi believed that each crop needs a different tailor-made approach. Thus he was cautious, at least within Maharashtra in launching agitations concerning prices of

food-grains in a situation when small farmers have to buy food-grains which the large farmers sold. *ibid.*

78. This was particularly so during the gherao of Raj Bhawan in March 1984, in which the farmers of Maharashtra, under Joshi and those from Haryana, U.P. and Madhya Pradesh had joined. See Hind, 19 March 1984.
79. Gill and Singhal, *op. cit.* pp. 1729.
80. Indian Express, Chandigarh, April 1, 1981.
81. Shaikin Singh: "A Unique Agitation" in Link, March 25, 1984.
82. Gill and Singhal, *op. cit.*, pp. 1729.
83. *ibid.* pp.1732.

THE BKU : EMERGENCE, ORGANISATION AND AGITATIONS.

The farmers' movement led by the BKU in western UP, is in many ways different from the movements in Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Punjab. But on a broader plane, it has raised the same issues and has set similar goals. Moreover, western UP, like the other parts of the country, where farmers have been mobilised through agitational politics, is an area where commercialisation and capitalism was first to penetrate agriculture, even before the onset of the "Green Revolution". On the other hand, farmers' agitations on non-party lines, was late to start, due to a different socio-economic and political condition of the region.

Farmers' movements on prices and other related issues have developed in highly commercialised areas, such as Coimbatore, Niapani, Malaprabha etc.. Western UP, among all the other parts of UP, is economically and agriculturally, the most developed region of UP. Wheat and sugarcane are the two major crops of the region. In 1978-79, the average yield per hectare kg of wheat (1815) and sugarcane (39,934) is highest in comparison to the other parts of UP¹. This enormous increase in productivity was due to the adoption of HYVs and extensive assured irrigation. In 1980-87, 72.4percent of the net sown area had assured irrigation as compared to the average of 54.9percent for the whole of UP². The high rate of consumption of the various modern inputs has highly commercialised the agriculture of this region, i.e., the consumption of fertilisers in this area, 58.5 kg per hectare, as

compared to the state average of 47.4 kg per hectare, is the highest, if compared to the other regions of the state³.

At the same time, western UP has a larger proportion of area under large holdings, i.e., holdings expected to generate a net marketable surplus. Only one-fourth of the holdings in western UP were in marginal (less than a hectare) category, compared to the 48.6percent in the eastern region⁴. On the other hand, 51percent of the total acreage was controlled by farmers with a minimum holding of 7.5 acres. As such the surplus holders dominate in the western region, both in number and area.

On the other hand, in the late 1970s, UP remained industrially underdeveloped. This was evident in the very slow growth of the non-agricultural sector, particularly manufacturing and industries of consumable goods. During 1960-61 and 1976-77, the economy of UP progressed at a slow rate of 2.3percent per annum, as compared to 3.3percent annually for the entire country⁵. The work force dependent on agriculture, therefore, remained stagnant. At the same time, due to the use of modern inputs for the production of the cash crops, the farmers of western UP had become more dependent on the market. But in the mid-seventies, the terms of trade moved decisively against the rural sector. The central government shifted the parity of prices between the agriculture and the industry by scaling down subsidies and increasing prices of inputs, supplied to the agriculture. An increase in the prices of modern inputs, such as fertilisers, pesticides, power tariff, without the relative increase of prices for farm produce, in the late 1970s, therefore upset the economy of the rich and middle class farmers of the western UP.

In the 1940s and 1950s, rural India was marked by the mobilisation of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers for higher wages and better working conditions. As elsewhere, these movements were sponsored by the Kisan Sabhas, or the agricultural labour unions of the established socialist and left political parties in UP ⁴. To counter this destabilizing effect of the rural unrest, the Indian National Congress embarked upon a multi-class-caste strategy. It paid generous compensations to zamindars and channelled a substantial part of agricultural investment to the emerging rich farmers. At the same time, it also set up special agencies to assist small farmers, supported a minimum wages policy for the landless and provided reservations in educational institutions and administrative services for the scheduled castes⁵. In addition, it appealed to the Muslims by offering them positions in the party and government, and by putting up muslim candidates in constituencies with a large muslim population⁶. This upper castes, scheduled castes, Muslim combination enabled the congress to outflank the opposition in many electoral contests.

The peasant proprietor class in western UP consists of castes like the Jats, Tyagis, Gujjars and Ahirs. They benefitted from the commercialisation of agriculture and became well-off. But these middle and backward castes remained unrepresented both in the congress and the government. Even many of the rich farmers, who belonged to Backward and middle castes, also resented the dominance of the upper castes among the congress leadership. "This resentment with the congress during 1952 and 1967 was reflected

", says Paul Bras, "in the voting pattern of these castes as they voted for independent candidates"⁹. In addition the enforcement of compulsory procurement of foodgrains and impositions of restrictions on inter-state movements of stocks in the late 1960s, prevented the surplus producing cultivators of western UP (wheat producing areas) from maximising their returns.

Charan Singh was the first Congress politician to recognise the political potential of mobilising the discontent of these cultivating and backward castes. He resigned from the Congress Party and formed a coalition of all non-congress opposition parties and finally launched the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD).

The formation of the BKD offered an organisational alternative for the upwardly mobile peasant castes, to assert their political interests which they believed had been hitherto neglected by the congress. Moreover, the increased prosperity of the large owner-cultivators in the western districts provided with the means to make an independent bid for power. In 1974, the BKD merged with an increasingly moribund Swatantra Party and five other smaller parties to become the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD). It in turn became the principle component of the Janata Party. Thus, with the victory of the Janata Party in 1977 parliamentary elections, agrarian politics for the first time transposed from the state to the central level¹⁰.

In its performance, the BLD under the leadership of Charan Singh, had accorded the highest importance to agriculture followed by small scale and cottage industries. Charan Singh opposed the congress proposals for collective or cooperative farming,

ceilings on land, nationalisation of privy purses, sugar industries and the take-over of the whole sale trade in wheat by the congress government in 1971. Thus, Charan Singh was able to develop a distinctive rural oriented economic policy, on the cost of deliberately underplaying the importance of heavy industries, in an attempt to reverse the policies and the priorities of Jawaharlal Nehru. But all these policies would have mainly benefitted larger properitors as against small peasants and landless labourers.

Charan Singh split the Janata Party in 1979 and in the July of the same year, with the help of Congress, became the caretaker Prime Minister. In September 1979, he revived his old party with the name of Lok Dal. But he was defeated in the mid-term elections in January 1980, by Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress. Thereafter, his political career declined. Charan Singh, therefore, was able to articulate the demands of the middle caste peasant-properitors of the wheat-growing regions of western UP, which consistently supported him even after his electoral debacle in 1980¹¹, until he remained at the centre-stage of politics at the state and national level and no other political party or non-party leader emerged during this period in the whole of the wheat-growing areas of the north India.

The death of Charan Singh in May 1987 occured at a crucial moment in the evolution of the farmers as a political force. It happened at the moment when the rich farmers, as a class, had started asserting, not only its economic interests, but also beginning to enter the centre-stage of the political platform. The political influence of the farmers was on the upswing in

several states. Farmers' movements on issues of prices and the alleged neglect of the rural economy had become a prominent feature in the political scene of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka¹². In the north, the resurgence of the farmers manifested itself in the electoral triumph of Devi Lal's Lok Dal in Haryana. Such a massive assertion of "farmers' power" constitute a major political phenomena and no state government or political party today can dare to either ignore them or openly oppose their cause¹³. It was against this socio-political backdrop that the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) was revived in western UP to champion the cause of the surplus-producing farmers.

The BKU, inspired by the late Charan Singh, was organisationally formed on August 13, 1978 and its first office-bearers were from Haryana. It had its head office in Kanjawala village in the union territory of Delhi. Its all-India chief was Rao Harlal of Monashwar village in Gurgaon district of Haryana, and the union had its units in Delhi, Haryana and western UP. Raghuvir Singh Verma of Baraut town in Meerut district was the state chief of UP¹⁴. But BKU became oblivious after the Janata party's electoral debacle of 1980. It was not until December 1986, that the farmers of western UP began agitating under the aegis of the BKU. Choudhary Mahendra Singh Tikait got the idea after he attended a rally at Baraut in Meerut district, convened by . Sukhvir Singh of Desh Khap and father-in-law of Tikait's daughter. Tikait, at that time, was the secretary of the BKU unit in Muzaffarnagar district. He noticed the impact of the

Baraut rally and this inspired him to strike out on his own¹⁵. A combination of factors made it ideal for the intense agitation in Muzaffarnagar district . Power supply in the area was far below the level of demand, the transformers were in bad shape and often out of order, the electricity department officials were corrupt and inefficient, they often demanded bribes to repair the transformers. In addition to all these worries of the farmers, the U.P. government in August 1986 , increased the power tariff from Rs.20. 50 per horse-power to Rs.30 . The BKU called for a Panchayat in village Sisauli to decide the course of action to be taken against this hike. The panchayat saw Tikait being elected district secretary of the BKU ¹⁶.

Tikait drafted a charter of 11 demands, all related to power the main demands were, withdrawal of the increase in power rate, no penalty for late payments of bills, prompt attention to power complaints, repair of transformer and other equipments within three days of their damage at the electricity boards costs, a minimum of 12 hours assured power supply, and reduction in bill in case of shortages,¹⁷ etc. For the implementation of these demands and to protest the hike in the power tariff, the panchayat decided to gherao the Shamli power station for two days on January 20, 30, -1987. Tikait was still not sure of the response of his call therefore, he invited Mr. V.P.Singh to help him out. But Singh was yet to break out from the Congress(I) and thus turned down his request.¹⁸

The district administration was shaken, when it saw the gathering at Shamli. It promised in writing to fulfill seven of their demands and to secure a favourable response to the rest from the

states government. Meanwhile the BKU gave the administration, time till March 1st 1987 to meet its demands. But the gravity of the situation did not register with the state government which was busy with the elections. It tended to treat the whole issue as just another threat that would be met squarely. The BKU then called for a massive dharana at Karnu-khera power station at Shamli on March 1st 1987. The police fired on the near violent crowd leading to two deaths.¹⁹ A truce was declared after a few rounds of talks but the government dithered on power rate reduction.²⁰ The BKU gave the government time till April 15, 1987, to decide on the matter or face a bigger gherao.

This time the up Congress(I) got concerned and called for a meeting of the Congress(I) legislators belonging to western UP, and District Congress committee (DCC) chiefs. The legislators and DCC chiefs passed a resolution in favour of reducing the power tariff. But at the cabinet meeting due to the stiff resistance from the Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board (UPSEB) and a few ministers no agreement was possible for the restoration of the original rate of Rs. 22.50. The rate instead was reduced from 30 to 25. But in case the farmers wanted to make an advance payment for six months, the rate would be Rs. 25 only. Those who defaulted would have to pay Rs. 30.²¹

The BKU rejected this formula and warned that if the hike was not withdrawn, they would again gherao the shamli power station on April 1st 1987. On that day expecting a big crowd, the administration had deployed at least 10,000 police and paramilitary forces to keep peace, but the BKU insured that the

demonstration was peaceful. Kisan leader Shard Joshi, and the Bandhua Majdur Mukiti leader Swami Agniwesh addressed a rally. On the other hand, the Congress(I) and Lok Dal leaders who tried to take part were politely kept at a distance.

The BKU leaders who had hoped to bring the state government to its knees with a show of strength, failed in their endeavour. Even the frantic messages sent by the Congress(I) legislators and M.Ps hailing from western UP, to the state capital, suggesting the withdrawal of the power hike turned out to be of no use. The cabinet which had met on April 1st, decided to hold on to its earlier decision. Tikait finally had to suspend his agitation, so that the agitating farmers could attend to their wheat harvest. At the same time he exhorted the farmers not to pay taxes and other dues.

Meanwhile Tikait got an opportunity to consolidate himself as an undisputed leader of the BKU. He decided to hold a kisan panchayat at Sisauli, on the 17th of every month, to discuss all the problems of the farmers and decide future course of action to be taken from time to time. He also tried to establish an organisational structure for the BKU. At the village level, there was to be an elected committee of 20 headed by a president, a vice-president, and other office bearers to look after day to day affairs of the BKU. The village level committees within a block, was to elect a 20 member block level committees, headed by a president, a vice-president, and other office bearers. And all the block level committees together elected a district level committee. Finally at the apex, there was to be a 20 member states level working committee headed by Tikait as its

president.²²

The above mentioned structure was nowhere to be found, though there were BKU units in many villages, blocks, and districts of the western UP. Elections were seldom held instead the presidents and vice-presidents were directly appointed by Tikait. Even the state working committee which met at Sisauli on the 17th of every month did not consist of permanent members; whosoever happened to be present there became the member of this working committee which after hearing complaints from the farmers leaves all vital decisions to be taken by Tikait.²³

The BKU's structure and style of functioning on the other hand is greatly influenced by the Jat khap council, a form of caste panchayat which has existed for as long as five hundred years as an administrative apparatus running the affairs of the Jat community.²⁴ A khap consists of 50 to 100 villages. Each khap has its own panchayat and a hereditary choudhary. The khap members claim a common ancestry and belong to a single 'bhaiyachara' community.²⁵ M.C. Pradhan in his book "The Political System of Jats of the Northern India", while taking into account the whole of western UP has listed about 20 khaps. Though all these khaps exist today, but politically and numerically, only seven khaps are of much importance. After the revival of the BKU in 1986, the choudharis of these seven important khaps²⁶ provided the secondary leadership of organisation and were designated as heads of the local units of the BKU. (see table I)

TABLE 1
LIST OF IMPORTANT KHAPS AND THEIR CHAUDHARIES.

KHAPS	LEADERS (CHAUDHARY)
1. BALIAN	CHAUDHARY MAHENDRA SINGH TIKAIT
2. DESH	CH. SUKHVIR SINGH
3. CHAUGAMA	CH. JITENDRA SINGH RANA
4. RAWA'S	CH. RANSINGH ARYA
5. BATISA	CH. SURENDRA SINGH
6. GUJJAR [KALASLAIN]	CH. MAHENDRA SINGH DHANG
7. GATHWARA	CH. RAMKISSAN

SOURCE:-Information found on an interview with the Ghatwara khap's Chaudhary Ramkisan Chaudhary, Balraj Singh, president, BKU Meerut unit, Narendra Singh, BKU president Baghra Block, Muzaffarnagar Rishideo Sharma, member BKU Meerut, etc.

Tikait's own rise to popularity was propelled and facilitated by his chaudhariat of the Balyan khap, claiming a history of more than 500 years of domination of 84 villages. Tikait made full use of the idioms and institutions of traditional politics to consolidate his leadership and mobilise the peasantry.²⁷

Moreover the highly successful agitation at Shamli catapulted Mahendra Singh Tikait into national fame with various organisations and political parties vying to clamber into the BKU bandwagon. This rise of Tikait as the leader of the farmers in western UP was also helped by the fact that after the death of Charan Singh and division of Lok Dal into two factions headed by Ajit Singh and Bahuguna, there was a leadership vacuum. Tikait, through his advocacy of the cause for propertied class and caste of the region filled this vacuum.

With this loose organisational set-up and a solid caste-backed support, increasing number of farmers were drawn from Meerut, and Muzaffarnagar districts, soon thereafter areas like Aligarh,

Bulandshar, Bijnor, Muradabad, Gazniabad and Saharanpur came under the influence of the BKU. Part of this success can be attributed to the spectacular dharna organised by the BKU in the January-February 1988 which acted as a catalyst generating a measure of political consciousness among the farmers and made them aware of their strength as a major force in the countryside. The state government could not access this emergence of the BKU as a political force in the rural areas of western UP. Thus it failed to announce any concessions to the farmers. Instead it threatened to disconnect their power supply from 31st January, 1988. This forced Tikait to mobilise thousands of men and women and he marched with them to Meerut. He made a representation to the divisional commissioner over their long standing demands.²⁸ A nine member delegation presented a charter of 35 demands to the divisional commissioner. Meanwhile the thousands of men and women, who had accompanied Tikait sat on dharaana on the grounds of the Controller and Defence Accounts (CDA). On the 3rd day of the dharaana, the local authorities conceded 13 out of the 35 demands and promised to refer the rest to the state government. But BKU's major demands i.e. enhancement of Sugar cane prices to Rs.32 a quintal, waiver of land revenue for kharif and rabi, remission of power dues and withdrawal of cases pending against the BKU workers in the districts,²⁹ were not met.

The BKU working committees, on the 9th day on the dharna, submitted a fresh 11 points charter of demands, to the district authorities. The major demands were (1) Raising the price of the Sugar cane from Rs.25 to 35 a quintal, (2) arrears of electricity

bills of the previous year to be written off, the excess amount collected from those farmers, who had already paid their bill at the increased rates, be refunded to them. (3) No penalty be imposed for non-payment of electricity bills, and a facility be made available to pay the bills at the nearest sub-station of the electricity board. (4) Fixed power tariff in relation to the depth of the ground water level, (5) an uninterrupted power supply for 12 hours a day for agriculture (6) Prompt attendance to all complaints from power consumers and immediate repairs of defective transformers in several village. (7) An immediate withdrawal of all false criminal cases implicating some BKU activists after the protracted Shamli agitation in 1986-87. (8) Tax relief for all farmers on account of the unprecedented drought in the cuntry. (9) Substantial reduction in canal water charges as well as in land revenue tax.²⁰

The unprecedented mobilisation of lakhs of farmers, laying a virtual seige of the Meerut town and its administration forced the state government to appoint two ministers. Saudul Hasan and Hukum Singh for talks with the BKU. The talks remained inconclusive-- as the government was not ready to concede the major demands of the BKU.

The dharna lasted 25 days, the Shamli agitation had provided immense experience to the BKU. At Meerut therefore they were very well organised. At the CDA grounds excellent sanitary arrangements were made. The volunteers of the BKU directed traffic and maintained order. They had even worked out a system of issuing passes to newsmen. Food and other provisions were supplied by rich and middle peasants from the neighbouring

districts.³¹

During the campaign starting from the Shamli protest to the Meerut gherao, Tikait was projected as an earnest leader dedicated to cause of rural people.³² His rustic manners and ways left no doubt in the minds of the farmers about his sincerity. At the same time Tikait was able to read the discontent existing in the villages. He had planned for only a four-day dharna in Meerut. The response he got from farmers encouraged him to extend the dharna. However the death of one Bhgawan Singh an old farmer because of cold also gave impetus to the agitation. His dead body placed on ice-slabs in front of the commissioner's office attracted media attention and was turned into a place of pilgrimage for farmers and political leaders. No political leader through out the agitation was allowed to share the platform with Tikait; instead they had to pay homage to the dead old farmer. This non-political (outside party politics) nature of the farmers' movements, explains Nadkarni,³³ is not surprising as national parties have not been able to project the demands of these rich and middle class farmers. However the farmers' movements are quite content in staying outside national parties because they have calculated their effectiveness to be the greatest, when they work as a pressure group from outside established political structures³⁴. The non-political nature of the BKU is therefore a direct fall-out of the lack of faith in political parties, as they have been more busy in power politics rather than taking up the cause of the farmers. Tikait therefore, in the course of his agitations politely, but firmly turned away

politicians from his meetings. All efforts of Mr. V.P. Singh, Mr. Devi Lal, Ajit Singh to woo him had failed, even Gayatri Devi, the widow of Charan Singh, was not given the honor of addressing the farmers from his BKU platform.

The partyless nature of movement had indeed, been one of the biggest strengths of the BKU. It has saved the leadership from internal squabbles and has aroused the people on an unprecedented scale: "We are with him because he has no ulterior motives like a politician", told Ram Sewak a villager from Ghaziabad district to a weekly magazine.³³ "...he is not sitting there because he wants to become Chief Minister or a Union-Minister". "...He is our voice demanding what is legitimately due to us".³⁴

In remaining non-political the BKU, therefore, has kept its options open. Tikait was described as a man holding 'laddoos' in both the hand because he was not after power, but as he claimed 'Kursi kisan ke peeche bhag rahi hai (the chair is chasing the farmers, as politician need him more than he needs them). As far as his relation with the Janata Dal is concerned, he had been critical of its president, Mr.V.P. Singh, silent about Ajit Singh and was considered to be close to Mr. Devi-Lal and his son Mr. Om Prakesh Chautala. However the growing differences between Mr. Devi-Lal and Ajit Singh increased his importance. But his attitude towards the Congress(I) had been no less puzzling. He had antagonised and once even insulted the UP Chief Minister Mr. V.B. Singh of the Congress when the latter had come to Muzaffarnagar for talks with him. With this strategy of remaining non-political, the BKU hoped to made out the best from all the parties.

This non-politicism of the BKU under Tikait was neither naive nor a matter of conviction-- , but deliberate as Tikait was shrewd enough to allow Maulana A. Bukhari, the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid at Delhi to address the agitating farmers in Meerut, as western UP has a substantial muslim population. After all communal harmony had to be maintained in a city like Meerut, which is perpetually riot-stricken.

Dipankar Gupta³⁸ points out to this secular character of movement. Tikait indeed made a very special effort to both renew communal harmony in Meerut and also to pre-empt any attempt by his opponents and detractors of the BKU to divide his organisation on communal grounds. During the Meerut agitation, Tikait used to deliver two speeches a day and it was customary for him to end his speeches on every occasion with the Muslim battle cry of "Allah-O-Akbar", followed by the Hindu battle cry of "Har Har Mahadev"³⁹. To a large extent, the demographic character of the western UP has a lot to do with the BKU's secular character and communal harmony. The percentage of muslims in western UP is much higher than what it is at the all India or at the all state level. At the all India level, the muslims constitute 11.3 percent of the population and at the all UP level, they make about 15.9 percent of the population. But in the district of western UP, such as Meerut, Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, Bulandsahar and Bijnour, the muslims constitute a bigger chunk of the total population. As the BKU's support also comes from the rich and the middle classes among muslims in these districts, it has every reason for being secular. In other

words, Tikait was aware of the damage that the communalists could do to the support-base of the BKU, hence, its espousal of secularism is not merely ethical, but strategic as well as political.

The BKU, inspite of its organic appeal and its show of strength, failed to achieve any concession from UP government. The dharana was called off without achieving its major demands--a higher support-price for sugarcane, lowering of power and other input costs. But in the process of agitation, the BKU, had consolidated its hold on the peasantry of western UP. The suspension of dharana was perceived by many as a climb down on the part of BKU leadership, as they had taken a tough posture against the government all along their dharana. But Tikait knew that by sitting so long on the dharana, the farmers were neglecting their farming. Moreover, the reports of killings from various parts of western UP, during "Rasta Roko" agitation, had created a tense atmosphere. Tikait, therefore, had to call off the 24-days seige of Meerut and instead launched a civil disobediance movement. At a mammoth rally of about five lakhs, he announced " Not an anna would be paid to the government by the farmers of UP...for us there is no government"⁴⁰.

The civil disobediance, or non-payment of taxes, got massive support in Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor and Muradabad districts of UP. But the attitude of the UP and the central governments, did not change. The Congress leaders under-estimated the popular basis of the agitation and resisted negotiations with the BKU leaders. The government spokesmen claimed that the agitation was nothing more than muscle-flexing by the Jat kulaks⁴¹. This

forced Tikait to launch a protest rally in New Delhi on October 25th, 1988. In Meerut, Tikait and his BKU were neatly out-manoeuvred, but at Delhi, they had come prepared with a week-long rations on tractor trollies⁴². The authorities in the capital were caught unaware by the plans of the BKU. None in the Delhi administration could suspect a deeper design, while permitting the BKU to hold its rally on October 25th 1988. Moreover, Tikait had selected this day to start his dharana as the proposed rally of kisans, as planned by the Congress (I), was on October 31st (to pay homage to late Mrs. Indira Gandhi). In spite of the threat of lathi charge, disruption of Tikait's speeches through cacophonous Western Music and no water-supply, the farmers turned the sprawling Boat-Club lawns into their home, and pledged not to move out, until their demands were met. /

The demands put forward by the BKU, were more or less the same, as mentioned during the Meerut agitation. But, interestingly, other than area-specific demands, general issues concerning farmers all over India, were also raised, like unrestricted inter-state movement of agricultural commodities. It was made clear, that the agriculture could not be treated as merely a family enterprise, where the labour put in by the family could be ignored. Tikait, like Joshi and other leaders, insisted that agriculture had to be treated as commercial units as in industry and man-hours put in agriculture had to be added in the cost of production. He also demanded a margin of 12 percent over the farm production cost for the farm produce⁴³.

The Congress (I) government in the centre was forced to hold

talks with the BKU. But once the Congress (I) decided to shift its venue for the proposed Kisan rally to the Red Fort grounds, the dharana by the BKU lost its significance⁴⁴. BKU only received an assurance, from the central government that it would consider their demands sympathetically. At the same time, Tikait succeeded in upstaging the Congress rally of October 31st. This in itself was seen as a major accomplishment of the BKU leaders. The Delhi dharana was a trial of strength and the BKU had come out at the top⁴⁵. At the same time, the Delhi dharana performed an important political function. By including some general demands of the farmers at Delhi and the participation of the farmers from the other parts of the country, i.e., Punjab, Haryana, Bihar and even Maharashtra, the agrarian politics of the BKU was for the first time transposed from the state to the national level, thus reflecting the growing assertiveness of the rich and the middle peasants⁴⁴.

The Delhi dharana left no doubt about the immense mobilisation potential of the BKU which became an important factor in view of the impending elections. Inevitably, farmers' politics was drawn into the mainstream of party politics, especially in states such as UP where the Congress faced a stiff challenge from the opposition. The UP Congress(I) government, under the Chief Ministership of N. D. Tiwari, was forced to negotiate a settlement with the BKU, during its prolonged Bhopa agitation. Tikait, once again in August 1989, stumbled upon a chance to launch an agitation against the UP government. What interested all the observers, was that an ordinary affair of kidnapping and murder of Naiyma, a muslim girl, had snow-balled into a farmers'

agitation and threatened to become a national issue. An FIR lodged, alleged that a group of seven men associates of Suja-ur-Rahman, the sarpanch of Sikri village, to which Naiyma belonged, were behind the abduction. Suja-ur-Rahman was said to be a close relative of the UP Home minister, Mr. Syed-ur-Zaman, who had promptly denied this fact⁴⁷. Naiyma's mother had asked help from Ashad Nazir, a BKU leader from her village.

Ashad Nazir along with other farmers of the area tried to gherao the Bhopa police station on August 1st, 1969 and demanded the arrest of all the alleged culprits and the recovery of Naiyma⁴⁸. The police lathi-charged in order to disperse the mob. In that melee, two tractors belonging to the agitating farmers fell into the canal⁴⁹. On hearing about the incident, Tikait marched with thousands of farmers to the bank of Ganga Canal and started an agitation with the slogan "Naiyma lao"⁵⁰. Perhaps, the 'Naiyma lao' movement would have fizzled out had the tractors not found their way into the canal. For Tikait and the BKU, it had become an issue of "Swabhiman" (self-pride) of the farmers, which had been thrown into waters. Their immediate demands, therefore were: (i) either the Chief minister or the Prime minister should come to Bhopa and see the fate of the kisans with their own eyes (ii) Naiyma should be immediately recovered (iii) compensation for the two tractors which fell into the canal (iv) the unconditional release of those arrested in the gherao, and (v) the suspension of the police-officers of Bhopa and Feerkazi⁵¹. The 'Naiyma lao' agitation caught momentum when her dead body (recovered by the police), was brought on a tractor-trolley to

Bhopa for public-darshan. Consequently, thousands of BKU activists court arrested, and they gathered near the canal in lakhs. Tikait submitted a fourteen points charter of demands to Mr. N.D. Tiwari, the Chief minister of UP⁵². The demands included writing of all agricultural, irrigational and power dues collected from the farmers during two and half years of their agitation, write to cut the trees growing on the farm lands, suspension of police officers posted at Bhopa, compensation to the farmers whose tractors were pushed into the canal, release of the arrested farmers etc⁵³.

The UP Chief minister finally had to enter into an agreement with the BKU, as the Congress leadership feared that BKU, despite its non-political approach, might adopt overtly pro-Janata Dal stand. An agreement was signed between the 20-points programme minister Narendra Singh and the BKU Secretary Mr Harpai Singh⁵⁴. It was agreed that Mr. Narendra Singh would visit Bhopa and make a symbolic appeal to farmers to end their dharna. The state government on its part would

- i) expedite inquiries arising out of the complaints furnished by the BKU against the police official and other connected with the Bhopa incident .
- ii) CBI inquiry into Naiyama's murder case .
- iii) all case against the agitating farmer would be withdrawn , except those relating to violence and arson .
- iv) Permanent mechanism to solve problems of farmers which come up from time to time. The president of the BKU Tikait and chief minister would hence forth meet after every three months to sort out problems and demands of farmers .
- v) The state government would remit the recovery of electricity bills of 1987-88 , keeping in mind the the

difficulties faced by farmers during that year owing to drought.

vi) A state level committee including the representatives of BKU will be set up to assess whether a case exist for waving off of other dues which have been accrued to farmers ,during the period of agitation till August 31 1989.

vii)New power connection would be give in a pianned way to the farmers and BKU will assist the government in its steps to prevent electricity theft and other irregularities . Moreover the BKU would assume the moral responsibility of ensuring that farmers deposit all the payable taxed in future.

viii)the state government would also take action regarding the problem of women especially for making proper arrangment of laboratories.

ix)reciprocating the state government initiation and cordiality shown to farmer the BKU, expressed its gratitude to the Prime minister and the Chief minister ,and assured full cooperation to state and central government to soive the problem being faced by the farmers. ⁵⁵

The only major concession that the BKU could secure was the remission of electricity bill for 1987-88, whose benefit would go to tube-well owners consisting only 10 percent of farmers in UP.⁵⁶ The two main demands with which the agitation began, remained unfulfilled: (a) compensation for tractors ,and (b) punishment of the police officials. But this agreement strengthened Tikait's hold over his followers as he might have faced the threat to his leadership in consequence of yet another useless dharana at Bhopa. At the same time, the presence of a senior minister of the UP government at the farmers' dharana to

spell out the details of the agreement, to some extent restored the "swabhiman" (self-respect) of the farmers⁵⁷. As the major demands of the remunerative prices, waiver of the loans and the electricity bills of the current year, were still not conceded, the Fanchayat at Bhopa decided to continue its two-year old non-cooperation or non-payment of taxes movement.

The BKU in western UP, thus, is a part of the ongoing farmers' movement in other parts of the country that started in the mid 1970s. Initially, it was Charan Singh, who through various political parties, i.e., the Congress, BKD, BLD, Janata and the Lok Dal articulated the demands of the rich and middle peasantry of the western UP. It was therefore only after his death that the BKU was restructured as a non-political organisation and Tikait emerged to fill the leadership vacuum. Through massive rallies, dharanas and gheraos, the BKU was able to mobilise thousands of farmers and put pressure on the government for concessions in agricultural prices, subsidies and other civic and economic facilities in the villages as it exists in the urban areas. Though BKU failed to obtain substantial concessions from the state government, but its real achievement lay in its conjunction with similar movements in other states with the common aim of acquiring national attention for the demands of the farmers. Today, this has compelled all the political parties to seriously consider the increasing demands of the agricultural sector of the economy in general, and the price-issue in particular.

NOTES

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25. For a detailed analysis of the Khap system, see M.C. Pradhan: The Political System of the Jats of the North India; G.U.P., 1966.
26. Information based on a personal interview with the Gatawara Khap's choudhary, Ramkisan Choudhary, Balraj Singh, President, BKU Meerut unit, Narendra Singh President BKU, Bagrel Block, Muzaffarnagar, etc.
27. Zoya Hasan, *op.cit.*, pp.2669
28. Frontline, February 20-March 4, 1988.
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30. For a list of demands see Amar Ujala (Hindi Daily, Meerut), 27 January 1980, also see Nirmal Mitra and Kuldip Kunal: 'Peasant Power', Sunday, 15 February 22--March 1988; pp.35-41
31. Deccan Herald, 11 February, 1988
32. Hasan, *op.cit.*, 1989, pp.269.
33. Nadkarni, *op.cit.*, p.3, 70,77
34. *ibid.*
35. The Illustrated Weekly of India, Feb. 28, 1988.
36. Almost all the members and sympathisers who were interviewed, reported that the BKU should remain outside party politics as it would increase their bargaining power to them as, they could be in a position to support their cause. They even said that if the present Janata Dal

government does not accept their demands, the BKU should launch an agitation against them.

37. 'The Fanch of Rajpath'; Indian Express, N.Delhi, 20 October, 1988.
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SOCIO--ECONOMIC BASE OF THE BKU

The preceding chapter has narrated the course of the events which led to the emergence of the BKU, the issues and the demands raised from time to time by the movement and the government's response to them. Given the diverse nature of the Indian agriculture, it was the local issues in each region, which provided the initial impetus for the farmers to agitate. But, like the other leaders of the farmers' movements, Mahendra Singh Tikait has also managed to rise above the immediate local issues that provoked agitations and provided the farmers of the western UP, a larger perspective and goals needed for a movement. Though the agitations could not achieve many concessions from the government, but they have been fairly well-sustained and have enjoyed a fairly wide base among the farmers and also their support, much beyond their regional base, though they can not be said to have covered all the areas, even in the western UP.

On the basis of the field-work¹, this chapter tries to analyse the socio-economic background of the BKU. The central question in this analysis is the class character of the movement. We can understand this from the class-base of the issues on which the agitations took place, the nature and the thrust of the ideology of the movement, and the reaction of the poor. It is hoped that this attempt will enable us to explore certain misconceptions about the BKU and also some of the exaggerate claims made by the union leaders².

Table 2 (on the following page), gives an overall picture of the level of participation and membership of the various categories

of the households, based on their economic status, in the five villages of the five districts in Western UP. The data collected shows a direct correlation between the size of the landholdings and the attitude towards the BKU in terms of membership, sympathy and participation in the agitations led by the BKU.

As seen in the table, the rich or the capitalist farmers (above 20 acres) and the large landholders (10 to 20 acres), consist nearly 3 percent of the total households (H.H.s) and their participation, as members/sympathisers or taking part in various agitations led by the BKU, is nearly cent-percent. The middle class farmers (4 to 10 acres), are nearly 13 percent of the total HH, of which 76 percent were active members, 16 percent sympathisers and only 8 percent were not the members of the BKU (i.e., non-members) and nearly 92 percent participated in various agitations led by the BKU. The participation of the middle class farmers, therefore can be said to be very close to that of the large and rich landholders. If these two classes are taken together, they account for 41 percent of the total membership, from all the five villages and only 2 percent are not the members of the BKU. Thus in terms of the total number of H.H.s, they are in minority, but they are the most active section in the movement led by the BKU. This fact was further confirmed by the members of the other two categories as nearly 80 percent of the landless and 50 percent of the small and marginal farmers had the view that it was the large and the middle farmers in their respective villages who constitute the core of the BKU and act as mobilisers of the other sections³. It is this section of the villages, who control resources like tractors⁴, bogi-garis, spare food and

money needed for the rallies and long dharanas. Almost all the active members from these two classes, having tractors, confirmed that they had contributed at least once, by giving their tractors to transport people from their village to the venue of dharanas, rallies or to carry food, supplies etc..

TABLE 2

LAND HOLDING AND LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION OF THE FIVE VILLAGES

Land Holding (Acre)	TN HH	NHH INT	AM		S		N.M.		P		J	
			NHH	%	NHH	%	NHH	%	NHH	%	NHH	%
Landless	928	191	15	16.4	12	13.1	64	70.3	40	43.9		
Marginal 0 to 4	762	26	26	34.2	20	211.3	31	40.7	49	64.4	3	2.6
Middle 4 to 10	845	25	19	76	4	16	2	8	23	92	10	28
Large 10 to 20	54	6	6	100					6	100	4	66.6
Rich 20 Plus	7	3	3	100					3	100		
	2005	205	69		36		97		121			

NHH=Total No. of House Hold; HHH=No of House Hold;
INT=Interview; AM = Active Member; S = Sympathiser; NM = Not Member; P = Participant; J = Jailed

Moreover, this upper and middle class of the village are the most educated and conscious section in their respective villages. These are the farmers with marketable surplus and those involved in cash economy, through sale of output and purchase of inputs, and are the one, most interested in the price question. As noted

above, almost all the issues that were raised, like lowering of power-tariffs, more electricity supply, an increase in the procurement prices of the major crops (wheat and sugarcane), etc. were woven around the price question. Thus, they formed an identical class, interested both in higher output prices and in lower input prices, which forms the base of the movement.

The movement, therefore, was led by the large and the middle farmers, but they needed the support of the small farmers to have a mass base. Numbers are important in agricultural politics to organise rallies and protest demonstrations, to block traffic and to court arrest in thousands, thus overflowing the prisons. All these could not have been possible without the support of the landless and the small and marginal farmers of the area.

The data from the five villages, as shown in Table 2, shows that the small and the marginal farmers (0 to 4 acres) constitute 38 percent of the total H.H., as compared to the 16 percent of the middle and large land holders taken together. Out of the total H.H. in this category, 34.2 percent were members, 26.3 percent sympathisers, and 64.4 percent of the marginal and small farmers, participated in various agitations led by the BKU. But, if we consider their participation as active members, in terms of the total membership of all categories is nearly 38 percent, which is quite close to the middle and large farmers (41 percent). Their contribution to the farmers movement led by the BKU, thus, is of great importance, as they are numerically more than that of the middle and large landholders.

One reason for the participation of the small and marginal

farmers, as Nadkarni⁴ points out, could be that though commercialisation of output permeates slowly to small farmers and finds serious obstacles due to slow absorption of the work force from agriculture; institutional credit and commercialisation of agricultural inputs have been more successful in penetrating smaller size-classes⁷. The small and marginal farmers, thus, in all these villages, were aware of the fact that some of them are certainly going to benefit, if the union secures concessions in agricultural inputs like fertilisers, seeds and power. As far as the prices of the output was concerned, they were all for the increase of the prices of sugarcane. At the same time, almost 60 percent of the small and marginal farmers were aware that the demands and the issues raised by the BKU would certainly benefit the middle and the large landholders. Most of the marginal holders (less than 2 acres) in all the 5 villages, did not possess tube-wells run on power; the issue of power tariff was of less concern to them. Moreover, they relied on renting the tube-wells and the diesel-run pump sets, possessed by the middle and large land holders, who demanded a rent of Rs.10 per hour and even if the power tariff was lowered or written-off, almost 90 percent of the marginal farmers were sure that the large landlords would not lower their rents and there was no question of recovering what they had already paid.

What really attracted the small farmers to the movement was the chance that they saw of securing some attention and even respect at the government offices, through membership of the BKU. The treatment meted out to the needy farmers by the government officials, is one of the most important source of resentment and

anguish. Farmers have often ended up with receiving harsh treatments or paying more bribes to the corrupt officials of the UP Electricity Board, State Irrigation Department etc^e. Infact, the BKU leader, Mahendra Singh Tikait, himself complained about the political graft and corruption in UP, since, on an average, a farmer has to pay anything from Rs.5000 to Rs.15000 for a job in the army^o. The membership of the union, thus, became almost an insurance against harrassment by the officials and against bribery.

Still, many of the marginal farmers were afraid to take the loans because of the fears of bribes and harsh treatment and were of the view that the waiver of the loans would only benefit the scheduled castes and the large and middle class farmers who had taken government loans.

Though the small and marginal farmers supported the enhancement of the sugarcane prices, but they were against the price-rise of wheat and other consumable crops. Moreover, 30 percent of the active members from the five villages, comprising small and marginal farmers, whom we interviewed, responded that they had participated in various movements and agitations launched by the BKU as free food was served there. They also got an opportunity for a 'joy-ride' to towns and cities like Meerut, Delhi etc.. Many of them joined the movement to show solidarity with the other village folks, as they deemed it to be a village cause. The landless, consisting of 46.2 percent of the total H.H., constitute the largest group. But only 16.4 percent of the landless were active members and 13.1 percent were sympathisers.

On the other hand, 70.3 percent were the non-members. But 43.9 percent of the landless participated in various agitations and dharanas led by the BKU. This amounts to 33 percent of the total participation of all categories and in all the villages. If this is taken as a trend in the villages of western UP, the landless labours certainly account for the massive demonstrations and mammoth rallies called by the BKU from time to time. But their contribution in the union, through active membership, is not substantial, as at the village level, the landless labourers were reluctant to become members. Moreover, the middle and the large farmers too, were reluctant to make them members. Even those who were members, did not have any say in the village-level meetings of the BKU. Some of them had become members as many in their village were becoming the members of the BKU; thus, they thought it to be a cause and prestige for the village, some were coerced to contribute money (Rs.2) and thus, were enrolled as members. The landless labourers in these villages, were aware that the movement led by the BKU, is not going to help them in any way, as the most important issue from their point of view, 'concerning their wages, was neglected by the farmers. Unlike the farmers' movement in other parts of the country, like Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Maharashtra etc., the BKU didnot even find it necessary to include the demands of higher wages in their charter of demands, at any point of their agitation. The BKU even demanded pension for the farmers after the age of 55, but excluded the landless labourers from it¹⁰. Actually the issue ofadequate wages was left unspecified, though combined with appropriate price-level about which the farmers were more specific (12

percent). Minimum wages, as fixed by the government, has a significance for the rural labourers. Though they are paid by the farmers, as they employ them and not the government, it provides a standard with which to compare and become a basis for demanding wages at least according to this standard¹¹. Though reluctant, but many complained, that they were not paid even the minimum wages fixed by the government. This was the case with unskilled landless labourers, where as the skilled labours earned much more than the unskilled. On the other hand, the BKU members and the leaders tried to explain their indifference to this issue by arguing that wages improve automatically, when farm prices improve, and the wages were already so high in relation to price, that the farmers could not afford them. In any case, it is obvious that the issues that were ignored as well as those that were taken up for active agitation, by the farmers have a class bias, and this bias was not in favour of the rural landless labourers.

One can see a similar lack of enthusiasm in improving the quality of rural life, rural sanitation and health, drinking water and schooling facilities. As a symbolic action, a few moves were made occasionally to identify the rural needs and propose developmental programmes. But the zeal for such activities was neither sustained in the area where it originated, nor did it spread to other areas. This is surprising, since the BKU does not believe in one-point programme like Sharad Joshi's, but, rather, it intends to transform the whole rural life. As in the words of Mahendra Singh Tikait, "This was not just a fight with

the government, but a fight with the samaj... .We will fight those men who abandoned their women, we will fight any show of obscene pictures, anything that is bad for the character. The fight for dharma would go on with the fight for Kheti dharma"¹². But the active members of the BKU, in the five villages surveyed, were not as enthusiastic as Tikait would have liked it to be. The populist demands, as Dhanagare¹³ calls it, has helped the kisan leader in selling a ruralist ideology, projecting the idea that the primary cause of the rural poverty is urban bias and not exploitation by the landlords and the rich farmers. According to Dr. Zoya Hasan, this emphasis, on developing the rural economy and society, creates a political space in which prosperity in the country-side can be promoted by highlighting the common interests of agricultural labourers¹⁴. The BKU made much of its concern for the farming community as a whole. It underscored the vital interests of all cultivators in the overall development of agriculture. In this framework, the well-being of the farmer is linked to the higher prices of their produce. Unremunerative prices affect not just the rich peasants, but also the small peasants who grow cash crops. All producers then, have a shared interests in demanding the principle of parity of prices, expansion of credit facilities and remissions of loans. According to the leaders of the farmers' movements, the emerging conflicts is not going to develop along the class lines; it is likely to take the form of rural versus urban interests¹⁵. The populist demand and the kisan ideology, blurring the existing class differentiation, would certainly not hold on the subdued landless labourers for long. Out of the five villages that were

surveyed, in four of the villages, the landless labourers complained that they were often forced to join the rallies and the dharanas called by the BKU, as they were completely under the mercy of the choudharys of their villages. But in Gunarsi (Saharanpur), where the Jats are in minority, many said that they were even given money as daily allowance, free food and transportation, if they attended the rallies and the dharanas¹⁴. An interesting point to note was that about 80 percent of the landless labourers from all the five villages participated in the rallies and the dharanas because of the free fooding, joy-rides to town and the cities like Meerut and Delhi and many apparently in support of the village cause, as many of their fellow villagers were taking part in it. Above all, the class differentiation is often concealed by widespread existence of 'Bhaiyachara' and peasant proprietorship in western UP¹⁵. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the caste configuration, as a reason has been one of the most important factor in the emergence of Choudhary Mahendra Singh Tikait and consolidation of the BKU in western UP. The social base of the BKU is concentrated in the districts of Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Moradabad, Saharanpur and Bijnour, which are dominated by the Jat peasant proprietorship¹⁶. Table 3 (on the following page) shows the religion/caste division of five villages and their level of participation in the union activities¹⁷. The Jats and the Gujars constitute around 30 percent of the H.H in the five villages surveyed. Their participation through active membership (78 percent) and sympathisers (18.6 percent) is the highest as compared to the

other castes. Even their participation in various agitations (85 percent) is near total. Moreover, out of the 18 people from all the five villages, who said they went to the jails for the cause of the union, 16 of them were Jats and 1 was a Gujar. The Jat, a quintessential peasant proprietor, is in principle willing to perform most of the operation on his farm even when he is moderately well to-do.²⁰ However this does not mean that the Jat peasantry is homogenous. Besides, not all Jats are peasant proprietors. A recent study of Meerut points out that landlords and rich peasants who constituted 7.96 percent of the households, controlled the largest area of 47.53 percent.²¹ The middle peasants who formed 20.44 percent of the households, controlled 39.3 percent of the area. What is most significant is that these landlords and rich peasants operate their farms through hired labour. Similarly, if we take into consideration, the relationship of caste and land-holdings, of the five villages under survey, as in table No. 4, (on the following page) it shows that all the land-holdings of 20 acres and above, were possessed by the Jats and the Gujars, 75 percent of the holdings from 10 to 20 acres (large land holdings), 67 percent from 4 to 10 acres (middle class holdings) and 45 percent upto 4 acres (small and marginal holdings), were in possession of the Jats and Gujars. Thus the Jats are not only numerically largest caste in the area but the possession of land has also bestowed upon them, the status of "dominant caste". But as seen above, the Jat peasants are not homogenous, the rich among them control not only most of the lands in rural areas but also credit and trade. But this difference has been blurred by a "strong primordial ties of

caste and kinship. This strong caste and community sentiments helped to establish a general correspondence between caste and

TABLE 3

Religion/caste and the level of participation in the 5 villages

S.N. bb	RELIGION/ CASTE	No. OF H.H.	No. OF P.I.	A.M.	S	N.M.	P	I
1.	GUJARS	34	3	2	1		3	1
2.	JATS	547	56	44	10	2	47	16
3.	MUSLIMS	450	45	9	7	31	15	1
4.	HARIJANS	402	39	5	6	28	15	X
5.	SHANI	130	13	5	1	7	5	X
6.	BHANGI	101	11	3	X	8	4	X
7.	BRAHMIN	91	9	2	1	6	3	X
8.	JULAHA	73	8	X	1	7	2	X
9.	BARBER	32	5	X	X	5	1	X
10.	BANIA	38	4	X	X	4	X	X
11.	DHANAK	35	4	X	1	3	1	X
12.	DHIWAR	31	4	1	1	3	2	X
13.	GADARIA	18	2	X	X	2	X	X
14.	KUMAHAR	15	2	X	X	2	X	X
15.	CARPENTER	8	2	X	X	2	X	X
	TOTAL	2005	207	72	29	110	98	18

H.H=HOUSE HOLD; P.I.=PERSON INTERVIEWED; A.M.=ACTIVE MEMBER;
S=SYMPATHISER; N.M.=NOT MEMBER; P=FARTICIPATION IN AGITATION
J=JAIL.

TABLE 4

Religion/caste and land holding relation in the 5 villages

S.N.	RELIGION/ CASTE	No.OF H.H.	LAND LESS	Holding in Acres			
				SMALL 0-4	MIDDLE 4-10	LARGE 10-20	RICH 20 PLUS
1.	GUJARS	34	X	17	9	5	3
2.	JATS	547	1	343	163	36	4
3.	MUSLIMS	450	288	114	40	8	X
4.	HARIJANS	402	341	59	2	X	X
5.	SHANI	130	5	97	25	3	X
6.	BHANGI	101	90	11	X	X	X
7.	BRAHMIN	91	2	77	12	X	X
8.	JULAHA	73	73	X	X	X	X
9.	BARBER	32	29	3	X	X	X
10.	BANIA	38	18	20	X	X	X
11.	DHANAK	35	30	5	X	X	X
12.	DHIWAR	31	20	11	X	X	X
13.	GADARIA	18	11	2	3	2	X
14.	KUMAHAR	15	14	1	X	X	X
15.	CARPENTER	8	6	2	X	X	X
TOTAL		2005	928	762	254	54	7

H.H=HOUSE HOLD

class in western UP society, where the BKU has propagated that the interests of the farmers and the jat community are co-terminious. The survey from the five villages, more or less, confirms this as the participation of the Jats in these villages

through membership/sympathisers is cent-per-cent. Moreover, all these villages had a sarpanch, who was a Jat and acted as the president of the BKU unit of their respective villages. Even around 50 percent of the Jats from each village admitted that since Mahendra Singh Tikait was their Choudhary, his decisions ought to be followed and when a call for any rally or dharna was given by the choudhary, it becomes their duty to see that one person from each house-hold, irrespective of class or caste, in their village, participated as the well-being of the village and the farming community was attached to the success of the farmers' movement. The Jats, combined with the Gujars in all these villages have therefore played the role of mobilising the farmers and landless-labours from other caste and communities, but very few accepted in principle that the BKU was dominated by the Jats only, there were around 25 percent jats who accepted the fact that not only the union was led and dominated by their own caste in their village, but it was true in the case of the whole western U.P.

The Muslims, Harijans, Shani, Bhangi and Brahmins, though they are diverse according to the social hierarchy, but their involvement with the union has been more or less same in the villages under survey. They together account for 58.5 percent of the total H.H, out of which 21.5 percent were active members, 12.8 percent sympathisers, but 68.3 percent were not members and only 35.6 percent participated in various agitations led by the BKU, which no doubt is less than that compared to that of the jats and gujars, but still is no less significant. Table 4 (on the following page) shows that among the above said castes, 10

percent of muslims, 13 percent of brahmins, 22 percent of shani, 5 H.H out of 18 H.H among Gadharis and 2 H.H out of 40 H.H interviewed among the harijans, had above 4 acres and below 20 acres (middle or large land owners). It was generally this middle and large land-holders who actively participated in the activities of the BKU, through active membership and as seen earlier, they were conscious that the demands and issues raised by the BKU would certainly benefit them. but even out of these middle and large land holders nearly 90 percent admitted that the union was basically led by the jats and they had no say in the decision making process of the union, right from the village panchayat to the state level. On the other hand the small and marginal farmers among muslims (114 H.H), brahmins (77 H.H), harijans (59 H.H) , shani (97 H.H), gadharia (20 H.H) regarded the BKU as a genuine organisation of farmers and since they were kaskars (farmers) , it was their duty to contribute to the union's cause as much as possible, but majority of them complained that as they were dependent on the large land-holders they were forced to participate in rallies or dharnas, or went for free food and joy-ride and some, particularly from Gunarsi village (Shaharanpur), were even offered money as allowances, if they participated.

On the other hand, the Julahas, barbers, Dhanaks, Dhiwar, Gadaria, Kumhar and carpenters, belonging to the service castes (OBCs) or the scheduled castes taken together, consist of 13.1 percent of the total HH. Out of 31 people interviewed from these castes from all the five villages taken together, only one Dhiwar

was an active member and three, one each from Dhiwar, Dhanak and Julaha were sympathisers. But 90 percent of these castes were not even the members of the union, which accounts for 25 percent of the total non-members taken together from all the five villages. This shows that, though Choudhary Mahendra Singh Tikait, at the initial stages was able to consolidate himself by using the khap system of Jats on the caste line, but the inherent limitations of the patterns of mobilisation through caste lines, later surfaced and even the broad-based ideology of rural versus urban, failed to mobilise the services and the scheduled castes. The disparity between these OBCs, the scheduled castes and the dominant caste is both economic and social. While, by and large, the latter are a propertied class, the former are proletariat²⁷. Dependence of the OBCs and the scheduled castes for employment and consumption loans on the dominant castes (Jats), provide immense scope for exploitation. These castes are also socially oppressed and isolated and have been kept out of the benefits of the developmental programmes initiated by the government. Poor peasants, agricultural labourers and village artisans have had access to few benefits from land reforms and the green revolution and are likely to derive much advantage from the politics of the farmers' movement²⁸. Even farmers' leaders, like Sharad Joshi, Nanjundaswamy and Naidu were unable to sell their ruralist ideology to these lower castes and class. An outlet into urban employment is the only opportunity to these castes to escape from the social and economic oppression in the villages²⁹. All the small, marginal farmers and landless labourers, belonging to the lower castes, in all the five villages under survey, were

against some of the basic demands of the BKU, i.e., the increase in the price of wheat and other consumable crops, which according to them, would amount to pricing-out at a single stroke, the agricultural labourers and the marginal farmers, who have to purchase rice, wheat for consumption. Nor do they accept the view that once the prices are increased, agricultural wages, too, will increase. Rishidev Sharma (Cong.I), belonging to Chadausi Kash (Meerut), pointed out that though the prices of wheat and sugarcane have much more than doubled in the preceeding decade, but the wages have remained, practically the same, or have been raised only marginally. The fact that no agitation, not even a symbolic act of pressurising the government, to raise the minimum wages took place, has not gone unnoticed by the scheduled and the other service castes. On the other hand, the farmers have resisted when these castes have asked for the implementation of at least the minimum wages. During the field-work, we noticed that the farmers, on the one hand, were well-organised and were fighting against the government for concessions in electricity dues and loan repayments, on the other hand, they were also against the agricultural labourers, who often demanded the implementation of the minimum wages. When these issues were raised during the interviews, most of the rich and the middle class farmers were reluctant to talk about it, dismissing the question by saying that the wages are already high and labourers are few. But, at the same time, they had boycotted the local labourers and had started hiring outside help³⁰.

The scheduled castes had a different perspective about the nature

and the role of the bureaucracy, as many Harijans (Chamars), Julahas, Bhangis etc. had recieved loans and other help form the banks and cooperatives in their villages. Thus, a bureaucracy, committed to the implementation of programmes for the alleviation of the rural poverty is in the interest of the poor and any agitation, which demoralises such bureaucracy and resist their access to the rural poor, is anti-poepie. Though undoubtedly, corruption and indifference on the part of the bureaucracy, had to be fought, but they felt that to regard the whole of the bureaucracy as an enemy, is erranous. The restrictions imposed by the BKU on government officials, on entering their villages, except with the permission of the rural elite, has not only restricted whatever little aid, the rural poor recieved from the government, but could also be used and have been used to prevent the access of officials in times of strife between the scheduled castes and the dominant castes.

In normal circumstances, the BKU has not prevented the access of the government officials to the marginal farmers and the landless labourers. But once the tension deveiops between the two, farmers deliberately attempt to isolate the officials from the poor. A BKU activist, Narender Singh (President, BKU unit, Baghra block, Muzaffarnagar), was candid enough to tell, "If the labourers get monetary or material benefits or loans from the government, they cannot repay them, since they spend it on liquor, or they develop their own activities, like livestock raising, and will not come for agricultural coolie work....agriculture will then suffer in want of the coolies". The latter was the real reason²⁴.

The difficulties of the scheduled and the other lower castes, in this region, has deepened as the emergence of the BKU as a force in the rural area has bestowed more power to the same local upper caste Jats and middle and rich farmers. At the same time, there is no organised movement of the scheduled castes in the area, as it exists in the states of Tamilnadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Swami Agnivesh has formed a 'Bandhua Mazdoor Mukti Morcha', but it has no organisation or any impact on the districts under survey. Rather, he has been sympathetic to the farmers' movements and against their exploitation by the urban elite. Many times, he has shared the platform of Tikait to put his point forward to the government and the kisans. Tikait, by including him, in his rallies and dharanas, has tried to rope in the landless labourers belonging to the scheduled castes, to his side. The scheduled castes and other lower castes of the area knew that the farmers' movement were for restoring the dominance of middle and the upper castes, which they had enjoyed under the leadership of Chaudury Charan Singh. They feel that the actual struggle of the BKU is targetted at the short-term economic concessions and improving their power within the existing social and economic structures rather than changing the entire system. The socio-economic base of the BKU, therefore, consists of the rich and the middle class farmers, belonging to the middle castes, who happen to be numerically important in the major parts of the western UP. The BKU articulated the demands of these surplus-producing castes and classes, who participate in the market, by selling their surplus and using modern inputs for

agriculture. This has been done by propogating a kisan ideology, whereby, the whole rural Bharat is regarded to be a homogenous 'phalanex' poised against the urban India.

NOTES

1. The details of the methodology of data collection is given in the introduction of this dissertation.
2. Choudhary Mahendra Singh Tikait and other BKU leaders have claimed that their fight is against the government for the benefit of the whole rural peasantry, irrespective of caste or class.
3. Information based on field-work note book.
4. See Appendix 3.
5. Information based on field work note book.
6. M.V. Nadkarni: Farmers' movements in India, New Delhi, Allied Publishers, 1984; pp. 149.
7. Ibid.; pp.149-50.
8. N.S. Saxena: "Politics of Law and Order"; The Times of India, Bombay, April 13, 1988, p.8.
9. "Honour in Retreat" (Special feature); India Today, (13), 15th March, 1988; pp.84-86.
10. The Times of India, New Delhi, Oct. 26, 1988.
11. Nadkarni: op.cit.; pp. 145.
12. "The Sarpanch of Rajpath Gaon", Indian Express, 1988.
13. For further details, see D.N. Dhanagare: 'An Apoliticist Populism'; Seminar, 352, Dec. 1988, pp.24-31.
14. Zoya Hasan: "Self-Serving Guardians: formation and Strategy of BKU"; Economic and Political Weekly, Dec.2, 1988; pp.2668.
15. Ibid.; pp.268.
16. Gunarsi village in Saharanpur had only 7 HH of the Jats and the lower and scheduled castes were more in numbers. Thus, the situation being different, the Jats, paid money to those participating in the movement.
17. Zoya Hasan; op.cit.; pp.2669.
18. Ibid.

19. For methodology of the field-work see the introduction of this dissertation.
20. Andre Beattile: "Studies in Agriculture"; O.U.P., Delhi 1977, pp.19, as cited in Hasan: op.cit.; pp.2669.
21. Jagpal Singh: Changing Agrarian Relations and Politics in U.P.: A Study of Meerut District, 1952-85; unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, J.N.U., 1988.
22. The concept of Dominant Caste was evolved by M.N. Srinivas. According to him, a caste may be said to be dominant, when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields political and economic power. A large and powerful caste group can be more dominant, if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not low. M.N. Srinivas: "The Social System of a Mysore village", cited in Mc Kim Marriot(ed.): In Village India, 1955.
23. See M.C. Pradhan: The Political System of the Jats in Northern India; O.U.P., Bombay, 1986; pp.57-59.
24. Hasan: op.cit.; pp.2669.
25. Information based on some grass-root leaders of the BKU, i.e., Dr. Mehkar Singh, Publicity Secy., Meerut unit, Narendra Singh, President, Baghra block (Muzaffarnagar), Ch. Meharchandra Singh, Sarpanch, Gunarsi village, Saharanpur, Jasbir Singh, Muradabad district, and others.
26. Information based with interview based on Shama (a harijan), BKU member, Muzaffarnagar, Bhopal Singh (Sahni), BKU member, Meerut, Maanjoor Ahmad, BKU member, Saharanpur, Sallauddin, BKU member, Moradabad, etc..
27. Nadkarni: op.cit.; pp.148.
28. Hasan: op.cit.; pp.2669.
29. Nadkarni: op.cit.; pp.149.
30. The farmers in this region said that during harvest and plantation they preferred labourers from Bihar and other states.
31. In a personal interview with Joginder Singh, Muzaffarnagar, in Feb. 1989.

CONCLUSION

Agrarian mobilisation in the form of peasants' struggle and movements has a long history in India. The Communist parties, in the 1950s, and 1960s, had mobilised the rural poor against the exploitative feudal order prevailing in the countryside. These movements of the rural poor have a clear-cut goal of restructuring the exploitative agrarian structure and of promoting faster economic development that provides employment and security to all. The contemporary farmers' movements on the other hand regards the whole rural India as an undifferentiated phalanx, which has been exploited by the urban based industrialists through governmental policies. Once the government corrects its unfavourable policies towards agriculture, the country will achieve a faster rate of economic development. This will end the present inequalitarian social and economic order.

The farmers' movements in Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Punjab articulated the discontent of the surplus-producing farmers in these regions. In all these states the movement started with different issues peculiar to their own region. But in the course of the movement, the region-specific demands, became secondary, giving way to populist demands. The rallies and dharanas sponsored by the farmers, got massive response and was well-sustained. With the progress of the movement, the class character of the leaders and their demands, became clear, thus cutting the support base of the movement.

On a broader plane, the mobilisation of farmers in western UP, seems to be no different than that of the farmers' movements in

other parts of the country. The BKU, raised the same issues, in the mid of 1980s, which were raised by the farmers of these states in the late 1970s. It was the Shamli agitation, which provided confidence to Tikait and the BKU. They came to realise that their demands had received broad acceptance from the farmers. The seige of Meerut brought the BKU and Tikait in the limelight. The week-long dharana, at the Boat Club lawns of Delhi transposed the agrarian politics of the BKU from the state to the national level, reflecting the growing assertiveness of the rich and middle class/caste farmers. By this dharana, Tikait insured that the farmers' charter of demands would occupy a place of pride in the election manifestoes of all the political parties. The impending elections and a month-long dharana organised by the BKU at Bhopa, compelled the UP Cong.(I) government to sign an agreement with the BKU.

The concessions obtained by the BKU, from the state government were more rhetorical than real. But it was able to consolidate itself in the rural areas of western UP. The non-political and secular nature of the movement left no doubt among the farmers about the sincerity of the leaders. However, the major achievement of the BKU was at the psychological level. The movement was able to instill confidence among the rich and the middle class farmers. In the villages where the BKU is strong, the farmers were not afraid of the corrupt police officials and the bureaucrats. The well-organised rallies and dharanas were able to arouse consciousness amongst the farmers about their socio-economic problems.

The farmers' movement in western UP, like those of Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Punjab is led by the rich and the middle class farmers. Both at the state and the village level, it is precisely this class, which has played an active role in mobilising the farmers possessing small and marginal holdings, as the support of the small farmers was necessary for the movement to develop a mass base.

With the use of modern technology, the small farmers in western UP, have not only become surplus producers in food grains, but also produce cash crops, like sugarcane. The small farmers, therefore, too are commercialised and are very much dependent on the market. As a result, the demands like remunerative prices for sugarcane and subsidies for agricultural inputs, attract them. However, by joining the BKU, the small farmers got a chance of securing some attention and even respect at the government offices. A membership of the BKU was almost an insurance against the harassment by the officials and against bribery.

The class differentiation among the rich, middle and the small farmers, is also blurred by the ideology of peasant proprietorship. Districts like Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur (bastions of the BKU), have an old tradition of the 'Bhaiyachara'. In this system, particularly prevalent among the cultivating castes of Jats and Gujars, the land was divided among the khap members forming a bhiyachara community. But the land was not owned communally, the peasant proprietors had individual and hereditary rights in land. This system of land ownership continued even after the British annexed western UP. The absence

of an intermediary between the peasant proprietors (unlike the zamindari system in eastern UP) and the state, combined with a strong and cohesive political system of khaps, placed the peasant proprietors, in a dominating position in these districts. It was this old political system of khaps, which was revived by Tikait. The chaudharies of these khaps, have provided the BKU, an organisational structure necessary to mobilise people and resources for dharanas and rallies. The small and marginal farmers belonging to these castes, i.e., Jats and Gujars, have rallied behind a cause which would benefit their whole bhaiyachara community.

The BKU on the other hand has failed to mobilise the landless labourers and the rural poor, who generally belong to the scheduled castes, services caste and other lower castes. They were either forced to participate in the rallies and dharanas or join the movement on their own to enjoy free food and a free ride to the towns and the cities, where the rallies or dharanas were staged. Infact, the most important among the issues, that could have mobilised the landless labourers and rural poor was the demand of right wages. But, no such demand was ever included in the numerous charters of demands, presented by the BKU to the government. On the other hand, the demands which recieved emphasis were the increase in sugarcane prices, reduction of electricity charges, waiver of overdue loans etc., which no doubt, would benefit the rich and the middle class farmers.

Undoubtedly, as pointed out by Dr. Zoya Hasan, the BKU articulates the grievances of those farmers, participating

actively in the market, through a complex relationship between caste, class and ideology. Through the agitational politics of the BKU, they have made an attempt to maximise their economic returns. These are the rich and middle class farmers from the middle and backward castes, ie., Jats, Gujars, Tyagis etc., who happen to be numerically important in major parts of the western UP.

The contemporary farmers' movement, indeed has a potential for checking the exploitative role of merchants, for disciplining local bureaucracy and for stimulating communitarian support for more productive and equitable use of common property resources and, of course, for bringing more resources for rural development and even for ensuring that they are effectively used. Considering the actual course of these movements, which have been ultimately usurped by the elite farmers, the over-emphasis on rising prices and failure to espouse the cause of agricultural labourers and the small farmers in an effective way, there does not seem to be much evidence of a revolutionary, progressive motivation in the farmers' movements. The farmers' movements of today, unlike those of 1950s and 1960s, are no longer a struggle for restructuring the inegalitarian rural society, rather, it is a struggle of the emerging rural elite for a place in the existing power structure in India.

APPENDIX 1

VILLAGE SCHEDULE

VILLAGE	BLOCK	DISTRICT
1. CHANDAUDHI (KHAS)	MEERUT	MEERUT
2. MANDI	BAGHRA	MUZAFFARNAGAR
3. GUNARSI	DEOBAND	SAHARANPUR
4. ATARI	MORADABAD	MORADABAD
5. SALEMPUR	BIJNOR	BIJNOR

APPENDIX 2

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE AND LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

S.N.	NAME	R/C	AGE	ED	LA	BB	IN	OC	Agricultural Implements			Luxury Items			Participation			
									TR	TB	TH	BC	J/C	M/S		R	TV	TP
1.																		
2.																		
3.																		
4.																		
5.																		
6.																		
7.																		

R/C=Religion/Caste; ED=Education; LA= Land in Acre; BB=Bank Balance;
 IN=Industry; TR=Tractor; TB=Tube Well; TH=Thresher; BC=Bullock Cart;
 J/C=Jeep/Car; M/S=Motorcycle/Scooter; R=Refrigerator; TV=Television;
 TP=Telephone; J= Jailed; CA= Court Arrested; OC= Occupation;

APPENDIX 3

AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS AND PARTICIPATION

A. I.	No. of H.H.	A. M.		S.		N. M.		F.	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Tractor	42	35	83.3	2	4.7	5	11.9	36	85.7
Tubewell	48	42	87.5	2	4.1	4	8.3	43	89.5
Thresher	53	41	77.3	5	9.4	7	13.2	45	84.9
Bogi gari	89	50	56.1	5	5.6	34	38.2	65	73

Almost all farmers having tractors had 6 acre and above land. Those having electric tubewells and threshers had four acres and above. Bogi gari was possessed by all the classes, including some landless labourers. A. I. = Agricultural Implements; A. M. = Active Members; S. = Sympathisers, N. M. = Non-members; F. = Participants in various agitations.

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