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PEASANT UNREST DURING 'MARATHWADA MukTI SANGRAM'

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper examines the role of peasant movements in the Indian freedom struggle, specifically focusing on their contribution to the Marathwada freedom struggle, also known as Marathwada Mukti Sangram or the Hyderabad freedom struggle. The paper aims to explore how the peasantry of the Marathwada region was involved in the nationalist movement from 1940 to 1948. By analyzing various case studies and archival sources, the paper assesses the conditions and challenges faced by peasants and investigates their active participation in the liberation struggle. The contribution of farmers and workers to the Marathwada Mukti Sangram is highlighted and examined through detailed source analysis.



KEYWORDS : Hyderabad, Marathwada Mukti Sangram, Nationalism, Satyagraha Movement, Peasant.

INTRODUCTION:

Marathwada was a region within the Hyderabad State and served as an administratively distinct revenue division during the 19th century. This region, with its rich political, sociological, and cultural heritage, has been significant since ancient times. Known as 'Asmak' Pradesh in antiquity, Marathwada was connected to Dakshinapatha and has a notable legacy of cultural and historical monuments, including cave and temple relics.¹ The area's history is marked by various dynasties whose influence is reflected in the region's art, architecture, sculpture, and cultural artifacts.

Marathwada has a longstanding tradition of the Bhakti Movement and progressive thought², with notable contributions from saints like Tukaram, Dnyaneshwar, Namdev, and Janabai during medieval times. The arrival of the Mughals introduced new dynamics to the region, shaping its historical trajectory. This paper explores the period when the Asaf Jahi dynasty ruled over Marathwada³, from the 17th century until 1948, spanning nearly 250 years. The Asaf Jahi dynasty came to an end on September 17, 1948, following the Police Action led by Union Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The last Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, born on April 6, 1886, and who died on February 24, 1967, was the ruler of Hyderabad from 1911 to 1948. He was one of the wealthiest individuals of his time and governed a region comparable in size to Italy. He supported the Razakars and the Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (MIM), leading to significant discomfort and exploitation among

¹ Sircar D. C., () Studies in Geography of Ancient and Medieval India, P.154.

² Kate, P. V. (1987), Marathwada under the Nizams, 1724-1948, Mittal Publications, P. 4

³ Rode Somnath, ' Marathwadyachalitihas (1960)' Aurangabad, Vidya Books Pub.,2011, Pp.166-168 (Marathi)

non-Muslims and Hindus in Marathwada. The five districts of Marathwada—Aurangabad, Parbhani, Nanded, Osmanabad, and Latur—were under the control of the Nizam's regime.⁴

Swami Ramananda Teerth played a pivotal role in the Hyderabad freedom struggle, bridging the regional struggle in Marathwada with the broader nationalist movement. Under his leadership, farmers in Marathwada rallied to express their discontent against the Nizam's rule. However, the leadership of the farmers' protests extended beyond just Swami Ramananda Teerth; it involved both visible and invisible figures who contributed to the Marathwada freedom struggle. On September 17, 1948, Marathwada was liberated from Nizam's control. In the new political landscape, a movement emerged advocating for Marathwada's inclusion in the newly formed state of Maharashtra, leading to the 'Sanyukta Maharashtra Movement' led by Marathi-speaking people. This movement culminated in the creation of the state of Maharashtra on May 1, 1960, with Marathwada as an integral part.

The present research paper, titled "Peasant Unrest in Marathwada Mukti Sangram," focuses on the mobilization of peasants within the Marathwada region. During the Nizam's rule, various organizations affiliated with peasants and the working class were targeted by the Nizam's administration in Hyderabad, often in oppressive ways. Farmers who supported the Marathwada Mukti Sangram and fought against the Nizam faced severe reprisals from the Razakars and the Nizam's espionage network. The struggles and protests of these peasants were central to the movement. As India gained independence, the efforts of these peasants were crucial in integrating Hyderabad State into the Republic of India. This research examines how the peasantry of Marathwada contributed to the nationalistic struggle and questions whether they received the benefits they fought for. Today, Marathwada's peasants remain among the most drought-affected and face high rates of agrarian indebtedness and farmer suicides, raising concerns about whether their sacrifices have led to meaningful improvements in their conditions.

WHAT ARE MAJOR ISSUES?

- The Nizam's government implemented policies and administrative systems that significantly impacted farmers and agriculture in Marathwada. The land revenue system was onerous, with high taxes imposed on farmers, often leading to financial strain. Feudal lords, who acted as intermediaries between the Nizam's administration and the peasantry, had exploitative relations with the farmers. This feudal system exacerbated the difficulties faced by peasants, as these lords extracted heavy rents and had little regard for the farmers' welfare.
- Agricultural education among peasants was minimal, contributing to their limited knowledge and understanding of modern farming practices. This lack of education further hindered their ability to improve agricultural productivity and manage resources effectively.
- Irrigation infrastructure was severely lacking in Marathwada, which, combined with frequent drought conditions, severely affected agricultural output. The scarcity of irrigation sources left farmers heavily reliant on seasonal rains, making their livelihoods precarious and exacerbating their economic vulnerabilities.
- The combination of high land taxes, exploitative feudal relationships, inadequate agricultural education, and insufficient irrigation infrastructure were primary reasons for peasant unrest in Marathwada. These factors created a dire situation for farmers, fueling their discontent and contributing to the broader struggle for autonomy and better conditions during the Marathwada Mukti Sangram.

What were the Reasons of Peasant Unrest in Marathwada?

Peasant unrest in Marathwada stemmed from several interconnected factors, with the land revenue system being a significant issue. Initially, land revenue collectors came from both Hindu and Muslim communities. However, in the final decades of his rule, as the Nizam anticipated potential threats to his regime in post-colonial India, he shifted his policies. He appointed mostly Muslim officials

⁴ Potdar Vasant (2012) Hyderabad Swatantrya Sangram, Latur, Vidya Publication,(Marathi) P.15.

to key administrative posts, including land revenue officers, and replaced Hindu administrators with Muslim ones. This shift towards a predominantly Muslim administration, often radical in nature, created widespread unrest and mistrust among the Hindu population and the broader elite and middle class in Hyderabad State.

The exclusion of Hindus from significant administrative roles led to feelings of alienation and suspicion about their status and well-being within the Hyderabad State. The Nizam frequently removed Hindu officials from central positions, favoring his trusted Muslim personnel. This polarized administrative system marginalized the Hindu majority, relegating them to mere revenue-paying subjects under a governance structure dominated by radical Muslims. The inequitable system provoked the local population, leading to the emergence of various forms of protest and resistance.

In response to the oppressive regime, the village hierarchy and agrarian system in Marathwada developed its own methods of resistance. Local leaders such as Balutedari, Alutedari, Patil, Kulkarni, Deshmukh, and Jagirdar implemented new revenue collection policies, including taxes like Ijara, Inam, and Peshkar, which were heavily imposed on Hindu families. This dual system of governance, divided along religious lines, intensified the economic and cultural crisis for peasants, driving them towards the Indian freedom struggle.

The Indian National Congress's promises of land revenue and land tenancy reforms after independence resonated with the peasants' hopes for justice and improved conditions. Consequently, the peasants of Hyderabad State, including Marathwada, increasingly aligned themselves with the nationalist movement, resisting the Nizam and his landlords in their quest for equity and reform.⁵

Mir Osman Ali Khan's administration heavily relied on land revenue as its primary source of income. The stability and prosperity of the economy were dependent on effective collection machinery for revenue and taxes through various landholders. However, the system in place, known as revenue farming, was outdated and problematic for cultivators. Under this system, contractors were responsible for collecting land revenue and other taxes from non-Muslim subjects of the state. These taxes included 'Kalali' (excise), 'Muhtarifa' (occupation tax), 'Baghat' (garden produce), 'Sar Darakhati' (tax on trees), 'Amrai' (tax on mango fruit trees), 'Kata' (tax on cutting or reaping), and 'Haq Naibana' (Naib's fees). Contractors acquired these rights after paying a fixed amount mentioned in their contracts. In addition to these fixed amounts, contractors also paid 'Nazardasti' (a cash gift), 'Sayar' (customs or transit duties), and 'Buzhai Iduzzuha' (goats for the Bakrid festival)⁶. Peasant subjects were also at the mercy of the master revenue collector. The revenue farmers' agreements required them to gather all farmers, assure fair treatment, improve the taluka's condition, ensure peasants received their due entitlements, and remit annual payments to the government as they became due.⁷

During the Marathwada Mukti Sangram (freedom struggle) from 1940 to 1948, peasants and leaders from the All India Congress Committee worked diligently to free Marathwada from the Princely State of Hyderabad. The committee developed a detailed action plan, and the peasants of Marathwada played a significant role in the successful execution of this movement in their region.

Peasants' participation in Nationalist Movements:

The Maharashtra Parishad, held on June 1, 1937, was the first conference of peasants from Partur Taluka in the Parbhani District. It was led by Maharaja Kishan Prasad, the Prime Minister of the Nizam State, and a prominent Jagirdar from a distinguished Marathwada family. A polyglot fluent in Deccani, Marathi, and Telugu, Maharaja Kishan Prasad effectively communicated with and understood the grievances of the local people in their native languages. During the Maharashtra Parishad, he addressed the peasants' concerns and assured them of his commitment to addressing their issues. Despite objections from the Nizam regarding the conference, Maharaja Kishan Prasad remained

⁵ R. Jayram, Administrative system under the Nizams (1853-1953), Bangalore, Ultra publication, 1998, P.32

⁶ Ibid. P. 32

⁷ Ibid. P. 32

resolute and successfully held the event in Partur. The conference received extensive media coverage in the "Nizam Vijay" newspaper.

The second Maharashtra Parishad conference was held in Latur in June 1938, with Adv. Shree Bhaskarrao Vakil serving as host and Shrinivas Sharma as chairman. The conference aimed to develop a network of peasants in the Marathwada region and integrate them with the nationalist peasant organization, the Kisan Sabha.⁸

The third Maharashtra Parishad conference took place at Umari village in Nanded district from May 29 to 31, 1941. This conference was pivotal for the Maharashtra Parishad's efforts in Marathwada. Prior to this event, nationalist leaders in Marathwada had initiated the establishment of the 'State Congress of Marathwada.' In response, the Nizam's government banned the State Congress and arrested its leaders, including prominent figures such as Govind Bhai Shroff and A. K. Waghmare, who were later imprisoned in Hyderabad. In defiance of this oppression, peasants and workers from across Marathwada gathered in large numbers at the Umari conference to express their support for the State Congress and solidarity with the peasant leaders.⁹

The fourth Maharashtra Parishad conference was held from June 1 to 3, 1943. Organized by A. K. Waghmare and chaired by Adv. Shridhar Vaman Naik, the conference focused on discussing the problems faced by peasants and potential solutions. Peasant leader Shamrao Yellwatkar outlined the conference's objectives. The conference was significant as it laid the groundwork for improving the status of the peasantry in post-colonial India and Marathwada. Proposed resolutions for peasant upliftment included:

- 1. Daily Needs and Production:** Discussions focused on the daily needs and production aspects, alongside mass mobilization of peasants in Marathi society, as well as workers, students, traders, and businessmen. The conference also advocated for the establishment of new agricultural universities and colleges in the Marathwada region. These efforts were part of a broader strategy to engage peasant and peasant leaders in political mobilization within Marathwada.

In 1936, the Indian National Congress held its Faizpur session in a village in the Bombay Presidency, near Marathwada. This was the first time a nationwide Congress session was held outside major cities, leading to significant participation from Marathwada peasants. The Faizpur session passed several resolutions aimed at improving the status of peasants in India. Key resolutions included the inclusion of peasants and workers at all levels of Congress activities and the development of policies to enhance the status of peasants under British rule and its dominions.

The resolutions from the Faizpur session had a direct impact on the peasant movement in Marathwada, influencing the State Congress of Marathwada and other freedom struggle movements in the region. During the 1942 Quit India Movement, peasants in border villages of the Hyderabad State were notably affected by the freedom struggle occurring in the United Provinces. Responding to Mahatma Gandhi's call, many Marathwada peasants participated in satyagraha and other forms of protest within their own regions.

Peasants' participation in the State Congress Action Committee:

In 1938, under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, the responsibility for the 'Individual Satyagraha' in the Hyderabad State was entrusted to Swami Ramananda Teerth and Harishchandra Heda. Alongside Gyankumari Heda and Digambar Bindu, they spearheaded the Individual Satyagraha movement among the peasants of Marathwada. Organizations such as Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, Maharashtra Parishad, Andhra Mahasabha, and Praja Mandal played key roles in forming networks with the peasants and workers of Marathwada. These efforts led to the unification and mobilization of peasants and workers at both village and town levels.

⁸ Patil Shivajirao Nilangekar, Political Awareness Mobilization and Changes, Aurangabad, Educational Pub., 2013, Pp.36-37.

⁹ Ibid. p. 36

The concept of Satyagraha and civil disobedience gained significant traction, leading to the emergence of the Jangal Satyagraha, a pioneering initiative in the initial phase of the people's struggle in Marathwada. The Jangal Satyagraha established a connection between the peasantry of Hyderabad and their counterparts across the borders of the Central Provinces and Bombay Presidency.

Role of Libraries, Vyayamshala or Akhada:

Libraries played a crucial role in spreading awareness of the freedom movement and global ideas throughout Marathwada by providing access to local language newspapers and new books. They contributed to national integration and the development of knowledgeable leaders and freedom fighters, serving as important centers for national education and activism.

Akhadas, traditionally known for physical training and bodybuilding, also played a vital role in the national movement by providing self-defense training to activists. These training centers equipped freedom fighters with the skills needed to defend themselves against the Razakars or the Nizam's police. Akhadas, often located in Hanuman Temples or Deshmukhs' wadas, trained young leaders, known as "Pailwans," in various physical exercises, including spinning sticks (Lathi), throwing spears (Bhala), throwing stones (Gola), lifting weights (Musali), wrestling (Kusti), and combat techniques.

In times of protest or Razakar raids, Akhada-trained activists were instrumental in defending their communities¹⁰. However, after 1947, Arya Samaj and Communist thinkers shifted the focus of the Satyagraha movement. The second phase introduced new strategies, including forest or jungle Satyagraha, mass mobilization, bans or strikes, Zenda Satyagraha, and armed resistance, all while adhering to Gandhian principles of non-violence in the Marathwada region.

Role of the National Educational Institute:

Peasants in Marathwada embraced the nationalist agenda of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, particularly his 'Chatursturi' programs, which emphasized: 1) National Education, 2) Self-Government, 3) Swadeshi (national products), and 4) Use of Khadi cotton. The values of these four principles were actively promoted by teachers and students. Many volunteers who followed Tilak's ideals came from rural and agrarian backgrounds, with a significant number from the Marathwada region.

Key institutional efforts in the freedom struggle were organized under the Action Committee of 'Chatursturi,' focusing on Swarajya (self-rule), Swadeshi, and National Education through the 'Bahishkar' movement. Branches of these 'Bahishkar' institutions were established throughout Marathwada, with major centers in Ambajogai-Mominabad (now Beed), Yogeshwari Rastriya School in Parbhani, Nutan College, and Saraswati Bhuwan in Aurangabad, among others. These educational institutions were supported by peasants, workers, and local officials who contributed money, grains, and groceries for the institutions and their students.

Educational institutions and libraries in Aurangabad, Mominabad, Parbhani, Nanded, Latur, and Osmanabad played a crucial role in the Marathwada Mukti Sangram. They not only facilitated education but also opposed the dominance of the Urdu-medium education system imposed by the Nizam.¹¹

Border camps in Hyderabad:

Peasants participated in border camps organized outside the boundaries of Hyderabad State due to restrictions on armed camps within Marathwada. Significant training camps were established in the border areas of Central Provinces and the Bombay Presidency. Notable camps included: Manmad for the Aurangabad District, Ahmadnagar for the Beed District, Washim for the Parbhani District, and Shembal Pimpri and Umardhed for the Nanded District. These camps were crucial for providing training and skills to peasants and workers, enabling them to contribute effectively to the freedom struggle.

¹⁰ Fadke, Y. D. (1960) Nineteenth Century Maharashtra, Vol.V, Pune, Shri Vidya, (Marathi), P.19

¹¹ Patil Shivajirav Nilangekar (2013) Political Awareness Mobilization and Changes, Aurangabad, Educational Pub (Marathi) P.50

On August 15, 1947, India gained independence from British rule, but the Hyderabad State, including the Marathwada region, remained under the Nizam's control. The active participation of Marathwada's people in the nationalist movement led to the need for a more direct form of resistance against the Nizam's regime. Consequently, a "Sashatra Kranti" or revolutionary agitation emerged. After 1947, peasants and workers in Marathwada began attacking government offices, police stations, railways, and banks, leading to a halt in communication and transportation in Hyderabad. These actions drew the attention of the central government in Delhi, which deemed the situation in Marathwada uncontrollable. In response, the Government of India initiated Police Action to address the unrest against the Nizam's rule.¹²

Police Action:

Following the independence of India, there was a significant push for action against the Nizam's rule in Hyderabad. This episode is a crucial chapter in the history of the Hyderabad freedom struggle. Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Home and External Affairs Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel initiated "Police Action," codenamed "Operation Polo," to address the situation in Hyderabad. This operation led to the liberation of Marathwada from the Nizam's rule.

In the thirteen months following the operation, a mass struggle unfolded in Hyderabad, marked by numerous acts of self-immolation by individuals seeking freedom from the Nizam's authoritarian regime. Many peasants and workers sacrificed their lives for the cause, fighting for the establishment of a democratic state.

Subsequently, Marathwada, which was part of Hyderabad, was incorporated into the newly formed state of Maharashtra. The creation of Maharashtra was the result of the Sanyukta Maharashtra Movement, championed by leaders such as Senapati Bapat, S. M. Joshi, Acharya Atre, Communist A. S. Dange, and Bhai Udhavrav Patil. Their tireless efforts and the long struggle for a Marathi-speaking state culminated in the formation of Maharashtra. Since 1960, Maharashtra Day has been celebrated on May 1st, honoring the successful culmination of this significant movement.

CONCLUSION:

The peasant unrest during the Marathwada Mukti Sangram had a significant and undeniable impact beyond the borders of the state, serving as a catalyst for similar movements by farmers across India. The details of the peasant movements in Marathwada inspired various agrarian movements throughout the Indian subcontinent. This research paper examines a wide range of conflicts and explores different categories of the agricultural population, providing an intrinsic analysis of farmers' issues through case studies.

In the former Hyderabad province, which was one of the largest, most complex regions, and heavily reliant on outdated land and governance systems, the peasant unrest played a crucial role. This paper aims to highlight the revolutionary changes initiated by the farmers of Marathwada within the context of the erstwhile Hyderabad province, contributing to a broader understanding of their transformative impact.

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