

## A Study of Daundi-Lohara Peasant Movement

Anil Kumar Pandey<sup>a\*</sup>, Jyoti Dharkar<sup>b</sup>

a. Department of History, Govt. Vishwanath Yadav Tamaskar PG. Autonomous College, Durg (CG).

b. Department of History, Govt. Vishwanath Yadav Tamaskar PG. Autonomous College, Durg, (CG).

### Abstract

The present paper deals with peasant movement in Daundi-Lohara Zamindari of Chhattisgarh as well as attitude of ruling Congress ministry towards the movement. Using their social and economic resources, the Congress politicians won widespread support in the election of 1937 for the Congress among the peasants, tribals, and labouring classes as the party pledged to replace British rule with a government that would serve the interests of all. We find that all peasant movements from 1857 till rise of Gandhi were sporadic in nature. Absence of proper leadership and unorganized peasantry were the drawbacks of these movements. During Gandhian Phase (1920-1947), priority was given to peasants' problems in the national movement. Radical wings of the peasant movement, whose ideology were based on socialism, had realized that Congress was not playing honest role in the fight of peasants with zamindars and landlords. In 1936, All Indian Kisan Sabha was formed at Lucknow with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati as its first president. The programmes of the Kisan Sabha reflected the aspirations and needs of the entire peasantry. Like other peasant movement, the Daundi-Lohara movement was also against the oppressive policy of zamindar and his agent. Congress leaders of Durg district supported the movement, but strong action was taken by police officials and colonial authorities finally suppressed the movement

**Keywords:** Agrarian Issues, Malguzari System, Chari Nistari.

Early nationalist leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Wedderburn, etc., had drawn attention of the Indian British rulers towards the extreme poverty and sufferings of the Indian People. But, it is also true that Indian National Congress focused on peasant's problems only from 1920 and tried to solve them in the beginning of the 1930s. Undoubtedly, it was Mahatma Gandhi who made Indian National movement in a true sense a mass movement by gaining support of landlords, capitalists, peasants, workers, women, students, minority and depressed classes for liberating Indians from oppressive colonial rule. The first three decades of the twentieth century witnessed peasant resentment in some form or other in India. Throughout 1920s and 1930s whenever occasion arise the Congress leaders had criticized the administrative colonial set up, but they did not take any strong measures for restoration of peasant's right. They wanted to mobilize the peasantry against the colonial rule but at the same time they were also sympathetic to the landlords.

Influenced by the Karachi Congress's resolution on agrarian issue (1931) the policy of the Congress Working Committee (1937) laid down that the programme as enunciated in the election manifesto, particularly the agrarian resolution should be taken by the different provincial ministries. Above all, the year 1936 also proved more beneficial to the peasants at the movement, when the agrarian programme of Faizpur was accepted by the Congress organization. A unanimous decision for the solution of the peasants have been taken to the effect that Congress is concerned about the apparent poverty, unemployment and indebtedness of the Indian Peasantry and eager to work for their upliftment. The agrarian conditions, land revenue system, however differed not only from province to province but also within the same province. The Congress therefore directed all Provincial Congress committees to draw up an all India agrarian programme.<sup>1</sup>

Indian National Congress leaders realizing that the integration of the peasantry with the nation and national movement was essential for strengthening the striking capacity of the anti-imperialist forces,

\*Corresponding Author: Email: pandey.anilkumar034@gmail.com • Mobile No. 09425557530

embarked in the course of wider social mobilization at a time when the full consequences of colonialism for the Indian peasant were coming to surface, moving him into an era of spreading discontent and economic and political struggle.<sup>2</sup> Nationalism helped to arouse the peasantry and awaken them in their own needs, demands and above all, the possibility of an active role in social and political development.<sup>3</sup>

One important question is what was the attitude of INC and provincial Congress Ministry towards agrarian issues? The conjunction between the peasants' own perception of Gandhi and his movement and Congress projected version of Gandhi and his Swarajya produced a radical frame of mind, and its sum effect was a crucial shift in the national movement from accepted form of struggle to more radical form of political protest.<sup>4</sup>

While examining peasants-Congress relationship, it is equally important to examine the peasant's perception of the Congress and its leadership, their reaction to the policies and programmes of the Congress and also status of the peasant leadership within the Congress. The peasants' perception about Gandhi and the Congress nationalist movement was invariably linked with their own aspirations. The peasants perceived Gandhi as their Messiah.<sup>5</sup> To the peasant, nationalism meant more than mere end to the British rule. It meant a piece of land and freedom from yoke of moneylenders, zamindari agents, and host of other middlemen who exploited them.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, peasantry's initiative in seeking shelter behind Gandhi had its own implication in practical political struggle. On the positive side it strengthened the correct perception or positive consciousness of the peasantry, for they perceived by anti-colonial struggle as the primary and basic task. They also correctly perceived the historical necessity of thinking the grievances and class aspirations with the basic anti-colonial situation.<sup>7</sup>

The election manifesto of the Congress in the year 1937 also exhibited the same expressions as well as the spirit of Faizpur agrarian programme.<sup>8</sup> Using their social and economic resources the Congress politicians won widespread support for the Congress among the peasants, tribal, and labouring classes as the party pledged to replace British rule with a government that would serve the interests of all.<sup>9</sup> Thus by all these programmes the Congress succeeded in pacifying the peasants. The peasants were convinced that if the Congress would win the election then all their grievances would be removed.<sup>10</sup> As a result; in 1937 election the leaders of Congress won 42 out of 56 seats allotted to the region.

The elections of early 1937 saw Congress ministry established in the Central Provinces. It was a phenomenal success for the Congress. On 4 July 1937, Dr. N.B. Khare formed the first Congress ministry consisting of six other ministers.<sup>11</sup> Congress ministry passed some laws with the intention to provide some relief to peasants like minimizing land revenue, irrigation tax and to provide loan on low interests.<sup>12</sup> But the unsatisfied peasants of Raipur, Nagpur, Bhandara, Sagar & Jabalpur districts organized a protest rally at Nagpur on 21st November 1937, demanding abolition of Malguzari system, 5 per cent reduction in land revenue.<sup>13</sup>

In the Chhattisgarh division, in the Dondi-Lohara zamindari forest satyagraha was started in the early part of May 1939. It was reported that about 40,000 trees were cut during the satyagraha.<sup>14</sup> Daundi-Lohara peasant movement (1937-39) was the first organized movement against local zamindar. Lal Fatah Singh was the Zamindar, but actual power was in the hands of Diwan Manaram Pandey, who had too much influence on queen.<sup>15</sup>

Daundi-Lohara Zamindari<sup>16</sup> was situated in the south of Durg in the Sanjari tahsil about 40 miles from Durg and 5 miles from Sanjari or 12 miles from Balod, the tahsil headquarters. It is bounded on the north and east by the Khalsa villages, on the south by Kanker feudatory state, and on the west by the Sanjari pargana of the Sanjari tahsil and the Panbaras Zamindari.<sup>17</sup> Its area was 280 square miles of which 37 per cent were covered with forest.<sup>18</sup>

Dondi-Lohara was originally in the possession of one Katanga Gond who was unable to manage it. In the neighbouring Kanker state was employed one Dalsai, a Raj Gond, as Diwan, who for his services was granted the pargana of Lohtur. Dalsai, seeing Dondi-Lohara about to be abandoned, obtained by payment of arrears of revenue a grant of it from the Ratanpur Raja in the year 1538 A.D.<sup>19</sup> Dalsai was succeeded by Bhuprāja who in turn was succeeded by Bikramsai, Anandrai, Narsingh, Ajab Singh, Rahipal Singh, Jaipal Singh and Lal Fateh Singh.<sup>20</sup>

The Zamindari contains 147 villages, 13 of which are inhabited, 24 are held by protected thekaddars, 81 by the Zamindar himself. The lessees are mostly Gonds and Halbas. The bulk of the tenants are mostly Halbas, Gonds, Telis, Kalars and Marars.<sup>21</sup>

For peaceful solution of problem like Chari Nistai (use of forest wood and pastoral ground) and forced eviction from land, on 28 August 1937 the peasants gathered at Malichauri Bazar and requested the zamindars for relief from the oppression of diwan Manaram Pandey.<sup>22</sup> But the appeal and representation had no impact, and the zamindar did not take any measure to solve the peasant's problem.<sup>23</sup> Helpless peasants appealed Sarju Prasad Agrawal to lead the movement. Narsingh Prasad Agrawal, elder brother of Sarju Prasad Agrawal, and Vasudev Deshmukh also supported the movement.<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Sarju Prasad distributed leaflets in the Dondi-Lohara Zamindari, appealing to the tenants not to pay the second installments of rents. The zamindar is reported to be touring in the interior to hear the grievances of tenants.<sup>25</sup> Sarju Prasad Agrawal travelled for three continuous months and by his lecture awakened the peasants. The movement was not limited to Lohara Zamindari, but extended to Panabaras, Chawki, etc. Old Patwari of the area, Wali Muhammad, who had actively participated in Flag satyagraha in Nagpur was also active in this movement and sat on satyagraha for peasants cause at the boundary of Dondi-Lohara zamindari.

The activities of Mr. Sarju Prasad Agrawal, younger brother of Narsingh Prasad Agrawal has been frequently mentioned in Government report, culminated in a forest satyagraha in the Dondi-Lohara Zamindari on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1939.<sup>26</sup> Prior to launching of satyagraha, Mr. Sarju Prasad started a hunger strike in the afternoon of 3 May 1939, but he gave it up on the 11 May 1939.<sup>27</sup>

According to confidential Government reports, in the second part of May, the local Congress leaders held meetings in the zamindari to criticize Mr. Sarju Prasad and explain to the people that the satyagraha did not have the sanction of the Congress.<sup>28</sup>

Due to this satyagraha, Central Provinces Congress Committee found itself in dilemma. Seeing peasants' mood and mass support to their movement Congress at last decided to solve the deadlock.<sup>29</sup> The Congress leaders of Durg went to the Zamindari as soon as they heard of the satyagraha and put forth their best efforts to have it discontinued. They also addressed a largely attended meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup>, at which they condemned the illegal action of the tenants, adding that their activities were wholly against the principles of the Congress.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the advice of influential Congress leaders like the Hon'ble Mr. G.S. Gupta, Mr. Jha, and Mr. Tamsakar, the tenants of the Zamindari resorted to cutting trees in the Zamindari forests at 11 places.<sup>31</sup> The Congress leaders also stated that it was wrong on the part of the tenants to take the law into their hands, particularly when government was seriously considering the whole question of their grievances in regard to Nistar rights.<sup>32</sup>

Mr. Sarju Prasad himself had issued a leaflet criticizing the local Congress leaders and the ministry. He, however, advocated prompt payment of rents to the Zamindar and advised the people to make report to the police about acts of oppression in the zamindari.<sup>33</sup>

The Deputy Commissioner, the District Superintendent of Police and the Sub-divisional officer immediately rushed to the scene of satyagraha. It is reported that about 4,000 trees, all of small girth, were cut. About 3,700 persons participated in the cutting of trees, and damage to the extent of about Rs. 2,500 had been caused. Some of the cut wood had also been removed by the tenants to their homes.<sup>34</sup> It is also in record that at most centres the satyagraha lasted for a day and was stopped completely everywhere on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May.<sup>35</sup>

Mr. Sarju Prasad made speeches in the Dondi-Lohara zamindari on the 8 and the 11 June 1939, and incited the tenants for satyagraha. The Zamindari bada at Dondi was also being picked by some tenants, the object being to force the Zamindar's employees to leave their service. Green bamboos had also been cut by a few tenants. Government passed orders in connection with the forest satyagraha and decided to prosecute Sarju Prasad and Wali Muhammad under section 117 I.P.C. Proceedings against them were also started under section 107 Cr.P.C. 12 other ring leaders of the satyagraha were prosecuted either under section 379 I.P.C. or under sections 143/ 427 I.P.C. The local officers had been asked to proceed against the picketers according

to law, while those who have been reported to have cut green bamboos would be prosecuted under section 379 I.P.C. if the facts sustain a case under that section.<sup>36</sup>

In the second half of June 1939, condition continued to be somewhat disturbed in the Dondi-Lohara zamindari. The followers of Mr. Sarju Prasad were advising the servants of the zamindarin to stop work and had organized a boycott of those who refuse to listen to them. A culvert had been burnt, and there was a wholesale removal of mangoes from one of the zamindarin's garden. Illegal cutting of trees also continued, while all trees which had been cut during the satyagraha in the beginning of May 1939 had been removed by the tenants. Mr. Sarju Prasad Agrawal and 12 ring-leaders had been arrested, while Mr. Wali Muhammad was absconding.<sup>37</sup>

After the arrest of Sarju Prasad, Narsingh Prasad Agrawal placed himself at the head of agitation on behalf of the tenants. Mr. Wali Muhammad, who reported earlier as absconded, had been arrested and was prosecuted. Narsingh Prasad Agrawal had made two speeches during first half of July 1939, and the questioned the action taken against him. By first half of July 1939, the social boycott of the zamindarin's servants was reported to have proved ineffective, as all of them had been able to make independent arrangement for obtaining services which were stopped.<sup>38</sup>

Mr. Narsingh Prasad Agrawal made a speech in the Dondi-Lohara zamindari on the 26 July 1939. Largely as a result of that speech, forest satyagraha took place at some centres. Eleven satyagrahis were arrested and orders have been issued for prosecution of Mr. Narsingh Prasad Agrawal under section 117 of the I.P.C. and section 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. It was also found necessary to send a detachment of the special armed force from Raipur to the zamindari. Forest satyagraha had now ceased and the situation was reported to be quiet, though the tenants refused to pay grazing and other dues to the zamindarin.<sup>39</sup>

In the first half of October 1939, there was a slight recrudescence of forest satyagraha in the Dondi-Lohara zamindari. It was reported that some persons from Durg were visiting the zamindari and inciting the people to satyagraha. There had, however, been no further cutting since the 2 September 1939.<sup>40</sup>

In the Durg district, there was again a recrudescence of forest satyagraha in the Dondi-Lohara zamindari on the 14 and 18 September 1939. 51 persons participated in the mass-cutting of trees, 15 of these were arrested and prosecuted.<sup>41</sup>

The Government was in close touch with developments. Orders had been issued for the registration of cases against the ring leaders responsible for satyagraha, and for their prompt investigation. It is mentioned in government records, "Prosecutions are not, however, to be launched without the sanction of the government. The question of action to be taken against Mr. Sarju Prasad is still under consideration."<sup>42</sup>

In course of the agitation, this satyagraha bore a political colour but was confined to the Dondi-Lohara tract only. By the end of 1939, about 75 persons including Narsingh Prasad Agrawal were convicted in the affair,<sup>43</sup> their property was also seized. Both the Agrawal brothers were also arrested and sent to Seoni jail. More than thousand false cases were filed by Diwan Manaram against the Satyagrahis. Two advocates Sri Triveni Lal Shrivastava of Raipur, and Barrister Sri Jatadhar of Nagpur fought the peasant's cases. Peasant's won the cases in two lower courts in Dhamtari and Raipur, but lost it in Nagpur High Court. Ultimately, this movement was failed due to oppressive and unsympathetic behaviour of the Congress ministry.

Thus, the analyses of this movement bring to light some important aspects of peasant—Congress relationship. It reaffirms the view that peasant had their own domain in politics. The hesitant approach of Congress towards these peasants movement was not transitory phenomenon. It was a product of the leadership's understanding of the nature of the national movement ever since 1920, as a movement representing all sections of the Indian society equally. It is true that Congress ministry stands for justice but the poor indeed will be the quality of that justice if it involves any injustice to the landlord. The party believes that it is only serving the true interests of both that it can find a solid base for swarajya. Dondi Lohara peasant movement also contradicts the theory that the exploited classes can be most effectively organized from above. Moreover, the attitude of Congress ministry during the movement, together with the use of diversionary tactics after disrupting the movements, proves that it used its power to disorganize the movements.

## Notes &amp; Works Cited

1. Pandey, Manoranjan, (1988), *Congress Leadership in Workers and Peasant Movement*, New Delhi.
2. Chandra, Bipan, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, New Delhi, p. 342.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Kumar, Kapil (ed.) (1988), *Congress and Class—Nationalism, Workers and Peasants*, Manohar, New Delhi, p. 196.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
6. Home political, File no. 5/3, p. 251.
7. Sharma, Ramgopal, *Chhattisgarh ke Raipur zile me swatantra Andolan (1857-1947)*, p. 74.
8. Home political, File No. 83,84/1937.
9. Kumar, Kapil (ed.) (1988), *Congress and Class—Nationalism, Workers and Peasants*, Manohar, New Delhi, p. 197.
10. Home Political, File No. 83,84/1937.
11. Verma, Rajendra (ed.) (1972), *Madhya Pradesh District Gazetteers—Durg*, Bhopal, p. 66.
12. C.P. Records: Revenue Department 1938, File No.25, p. 19 .
13. *Hitavada*, 29th November 1937, p. 12.
14. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the second half of May 1939.
15. Naik ,T.V. (ed.), (1970), *Chhattisgarh Mein Gandhiji*, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur, pp. 8-9.
16. It is most astonishing that DE. Brett in his memorable work 'Central provinces Gazetteers—Chhattisgarh Feudatory states has not written about this zamindari. Although he has discussed about almost all the Zamindaris, tahsils, towns and important villages in the appendix that has given the book.
17. Nelson, A.E., (1910), *Central Provinces District Gazetteers, Durg District, Volume A*, Calcutta, (Reprint edition 1998), p. 155.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p.157.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
22. Naik, T.V. (ed.), (1970), *Chhattisgarh Mein Gandhiji*, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur, p. 45.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
24. Verma, Bhagwan Singh, *Chhattisgarh Ka Itihas*, Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy, Bhopal, p. 200.
25. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the second half of April 1939.
26. Fortnightly Reports, Home Poll. F.N. 18/05/1939, p. 38.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the second half of May 1939.
29. Verma, Bhagwan Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 201.
30. Fortnightly Reports, Home Poll. F.N. 18/05/1939.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Home Political, F.N.18/05/9139.
33. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the second half of May 1939.
34. Fortnightly Reports, Home Poll. F.N. 18/05/1939.
35. Home Political, F.N.18/05/9139.
36. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the First half of June 1939.

A Study of Daundi-Lohara Peasant Movement

37. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the Second half of June 1939.
38. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the first half of July 1939.
39. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the Second half of July 1939.
40. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the first half of September 1939.
41. Fortnightly Report for The Central Provinces and Berar for the second half of September 1939.
42. Home Political, F.N.18/05/9139.
43. Durg District case File No. 15, Agrarian Trouble in Dondi- Lohara.