

# **AN APPROACH TO THE PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN NEPAL 1951-1960**

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The Nepali cultivators akin to that of their counterparts in other traditional societies in Asia, carried on financial and other types of burden since many centuries under existing feudal set up. But it was difficult to predict their ability to stand them indefinitely. But it was rather logical for them to find out an outlet to express discontents against the existing practices. It led to possibility to snap their patience at a moment most unexpected. So the cultivators must be placed at the center of all schemes related to country's development. The Nepali peasants were illiterate but they were not ignorant of their conditions. They were denied of rights in land. Infact, this situation was more than sufficient for the communists or the non-communists anti-government forces to make political propoganda by transforming peasants' attitudes from inertness to alertness.<sup>1</sup> This type of situation prevailed in many Asian countries. For the rulers, it was rather rational to meet fundamental needs of the peasants and introduce reforms from the top instead of waiting for the opponents to demand for an initiate it from the bottom. The studies of peasant discontents in other countries also proved this proposition. Therefore, the governments in countries like Nepal required wills and determination to work in this areas for such purposes. At the same time, there was another problem of threatening the interests of the landed aristocracy. The reforms in such aspects of the society has multifarious impact in the fields of political stability, stimulating agricultural production, helping to overcome stagnation of country's economy etc. Infact, even during the 1960s, Nepali agriculture was in the state of retardation and that the peasants were in the state of discontent. This situation was further deteriorated when the banned political parties

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attempted to use such a force in their favour to publicize their political commitments against the totalitarian regime.

The World Bank has critically examined the existing situation and submitted the report to the government of Nepal to proceed to the land reforms. Infact, it was primarily guided by the fear of the expansion of communism. However, it's recommendations keep immense significance in the peasant economy. The communist parties and affiliate peasant organizations have very clear opinion on the attitude of the World Bank on the proposed land reforms in Nepal.<sup>2</sup>

The situation prevailed before and after the revolution of 1951 led the cultivating classes to struggle for better life. The year marked an epoch in the history of peasant activities because the autocratic Rana rule tightly controlled them through existing agrarian structure.<sup>3</sup> They left no rooms for possibility of expression of their feelings. The peasants were exploited by the land owners to great extent. So, in due course of time they were organized against the usurers and other exploiters right after 1951. King Tribhuvan also declared to take appropriate measure to abolish the Birta tenure and promulgate the tenancy act to reform conditions of tenant cultivators. Consequently, the tenancy rights act was promulgated in 1951 for Kathmandu valley. But the lack of the records of tenants and absence of an able administrative machinery finally let to its failure. At the same time, the proposed act was not beneficial for the actual cultivators but favorable for the intermediaries. The act also made tenancy right a commodity of transaction. Later on, in 1956 an act was promulgated to prepare records of the landowners and the cultivators. The Patwaris were entrusted with the duty of preparing such records. They were also instructed to consult or ask the village councils for assistance.

The landlords in the western Tarai controlled a considerable areas of land which was called Seer land. They enjoyed significant rights in land even after 1951. The remnants and legacies of previous system and practices in agriculture were continued. During the Mahajanch (grand survey) under Premier chandra Shumsher's regime, the influential persons registered larger areas in their names. They even bribed the surveyors.<sup>4</sup> This malpractice has brought about undesirable changes in the existing agrarian structure and peasant economy. It changed the status of a large number of peasants into landless labourers. The peasants were suppressed and exploited by the landlords. The use of force against peasant cultivators was common everywhere. In the western tarai, the big landlords appointed clerk and Seerwars (one who takes care of the Seerland) to lookafter the Zamindari Seer. They proved to

be merciless in most cases. They let land for cultivation on the Malgujari basis to those who provided them with certain amount of money. In addition to it, they exacted various levies from the debtors as extra incomes. Of course, they were usurious and at the same time, notorious for sexual misbehave in villages. So, the houses of zamindars built in Seer land symbolically represented to it. Therefore, the peasants including the sufferers demanded to demolish such houses during the movement of 1951. The peasants of Butwal enthusiastically destroyed all such houses in the area.<sup>5</sup>

In November 1950 , the revolutionary government of western Nepal declared the end of the Bataiya (sharecropping) and the Hunda systems, and distributed all such lands to the cultivators. It must be regarded as the revolutionary step in the agrarian history of Nepal. But unfortunately the democratic government formed after the tripartite agreement signed in New Delhi ordered to return all such lands to the landlords.<sup>6</sup> This decision had relative impact in the society.

In the western Tarai, land was divided into different types:

- Seer land of the Zamindars.
- Tirja or the Numbari land of the tenants.
- Land obtained from the zamindars and registered in the form A, and
- The Ukhada land.

The Zamindars tried to protect their Seer land.

The situation everywhere was not favorable for the cultivators. The landowners and the intermediaries both in the hills and the Tarai exploited the peasant cultivators through various means. In such a situation, it was obvious that they would organize for the greater goal of peasants' liberation. They were supported by the outside forces to organize movements. The period from 1951 to 1960 is the golden age of peasant movements in Nepal. A large number of movements were organized by the Akhil Nepal kisan Sangh (ANKS) which have immense significance in the history of agriculture in Nepal. It has brought about significant changes in the agrarian economy.

## PEASANT ASSOCIATIONS, CLASSES AND STRUGGLES

The activities of professional organizations such as the ANKS in very important to know before analyzing various types of peasant movements. The study of peasants' dissatisfaction, demonstrations, programmes and activities. Their formal and informal organizations and the relations of these to the wider social system is of fundamental importance to the understanding of agrarian structure.<sup>7</sup>

There were a large number of movements organized so far in the 1950s. It was really beneficial for the peasant community in the country who have been suffering from existing traditional feudal practices. But unfortunately the emergence of the totalitarian Panchayat rule at once ended the flow of peasant movements. But later on, some of the movements were organized.

As mentioned earlier, most of the movements were led by the Akhil Nepal Kisan Sangh which was popularly known as the Kisan Sangh in the entire Tarai region.<sup>8</sup> It was affiliated to the communist party.<sup>9</sup> Although they were concerned with the betterment of the peasantry they were committed to execute political motives of the affiliated party. At present the ANKS affiliated to the Nepal Communist, Party (UML) is largest in organisation. The other organisations are smaller but played.

Almost all such associations devoted itself to various professional and non-professional demands written with excessive use of conventional Marxian terms. Infact all such demands, slogans and policy documents were written in such styles. For instance common terms include-<sup>10</sup>

<u>Partikriyabadi</u>	-	(Reactionary)
Samanta	-	(Feudal lords)
Samrjyabad	-	(Imperialism)
Aupanibesik	-	(Colonial)
Bistarbad	-	(Expansionism)
Shoshan	-	(Exploitation)
Bargasangharsha	-	(Class struggle)

In addition to it, following terms were also in excessive use -

Jana Sangharsha	-	(People's struggle)
Sasastrapratirodh	-	(Armed resistance)
Dalal	-	(Agent)
Samshodhanbadi	-	(Revisionist)
Krantikari	-	(Revolutionary)
Punjibadi	-	(Capitalist)
Janabadi Kranti	-	(Popular movement)
Shramjivi	-	(Labourers)
Sarbahara	-	(Proletariat)
Samajbad	-	(Socialism)
Samyabad	-	(Communism)
Nokarshahi	-	(Bureaucratic) and
Mukti	-	(Freedom)

There were professional organizations to work on behalf of the peasants the institutional leadership and role played by the Kisan Panchayat particularly in Bara district keeps greater importance in history. It attempted to protect interests of the peasant community. It's one of the important work was an attempt to establish the Maddat Bhakari a kind of emergency fund to help needy peasants.<sup>11</sup> It was very successful in its leadership in the regional form of class struggle. The activities of the Kisan Panchayat was an important aspect peasant movements in the Central Tarai.

The Nepali congress has not organized peasant organization as its affiliate. So, there was rarely such activities of the congress party directed towards the interests of the peasants. Thus, they are far behind to mention while studying peasant movements in Nepal. There are some political causes behind it. The party was supported mostly by the landowning elite. Therefore, B.P. Koirala himself was reluctant to favor the peasant community and support their radical demands. Even they were not in position to ignore them and their problems. A Communist party secret circular has revealed this fact. Then the Nepali Congress set up a secret organization under the name of the Suddhikaran Kisan Sangathan - Valley

Committee.<sup>12</sup> The entire responsibility was entrusted to Saroj Koirala. It is a historical reality that Nepali Congress claimed itself as the only representative of Nepal's peasant Community and its well wisher. It further claimed in the election manifesto of 2015 B.S.<sup>13</sup>

*"Nepali Congress has decided to abolish all kinds of feudal practices creating socialist economy through democratic process. The Nepali Congress promises to nationalize Birta holdings, end exploitation through land reforms, guarantee peasants' rights in land, increase production, distribute land to cultivators, abolish zamindari and fix land ceilings."*

The peasant community needed almost all such reforms to improve their conditions. But both the Nepali Congress and the so called Suddhikaran Kisan Sangathan - Valley Committee were not successful to work on behalf of the peasant community. Infact they did not pay attention towards the peasant- Cultivators. On the other hand none of their activities were directed towards the peasants. The communists were very active in this area of politics. The Nepali Congress itself was very much reluctant even to establish a peasant wing within the party. What the Congress did for Nepali peasants since 1960 until now is formation of policies mentioned only in the election manifestos.<sup>14</sup> It include-

- To implement the policy of land to the tillers.
- To end double ownership inland.
- Fix ceiling in landholding.
- To regulate progressive tax rates for those who cultivate land exceeding the prescribed total areas.
- To formulate policies for changes in the agrarian system.
- To divert agricultural workforce to industries and to provide to all those deserted due to changes in the agrarian structure.
- To distribute surplus land to landless labourers and resettle to those affected from natural calamities.
- To develop cooperatives and collective farming.
- To increase rural employment.

- To prepare records of tenants.
- To protect peasants from exploitations.
- To provide soft loans to peasants to save them from the usurers.
- To abolish inkind rent systems, and
- To make an end of the Kamaiya and Haliya systems by promulgating appropriate laws.

Now it is rather logical to say that these policies are framed and publicized without proper analysis and Judgment of its appropriateness. But the communists are extremely ahead to them to speak on behalf of the peasants. Even at present, they are implementing various policies through the ANKS on behalf of the peasants.<sup>15</sup>

#### ANALYSIS OF MOVEMENT LEADERSHIP

The peasant movements in Nepal particularly during 1951 to 1960 were led both by individuals and institutions. The leaders have their own identity as the political activist of various categories. It is a matter of greater significance that peasant movements were led both by high-ranking party leaders to the grass root workers. But majority of them came from the middle class background. Although they possessed various ethnic identity, there was no any kind of problem associated with it or created so far due to ethnicity and religious identity of the leaders.

The prevailing conditions contributed to push youths from the peasant communities to loud their voice for reforms. Such demands were radical and intended to bring about revolutionary changes in the agrarian system. The leaders produced by the Krishi Sudhar Sangh and the Suddhikaran Kisan Sangh (SKS) were basically belonged to the peasant communities. The leaders of the historic Krishi Sudhar Sangh (KSS) such as Padma Bahadur Budhathoki, Basu Pasa, Ram Rajthala, Nati Jyapu and others belonged to the peasant families who were fully acquainted with the problems of peasants. The some of the leaders associated with other organizations were from landowner's families . They also participated in the main steam of the movement. In some cases, they were landowners, intermediaries and tenant cultivators at the same time.<sup>16</sup>

Basu Pasa, one of the notable peasant activist always emphasized that the

leadership must belong to the peasants themselves.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps, the leadership must belong to the peasant community for its success. The peasant leader may not go against the interest of the community and discriminations may be avoided. In the same way the early organizations emphasized that a landowner is not supposed to support the interest of the peasant cultivators. So, the early peasant leaders emphasized that they must be cautious whether the landowners would be able to control the leadership or not.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the peasants must be cautious on their collective identity. This problem was formally discussed at Jaishi Debal meeting in which the mass of peasant selected Basu Pasa as the Chairman of the Suddhikaran movement. But Basu Pasa clearly replied.<sup>19</sup>

"..... not me but Padma Bahadur has spade in his hand. Therefore, it is rather logical to select him as the president of the Suddhikaran Kisan Sangh (SKS)

In infact, it is important to know that a farmer would be able to work on behalf of the toiling peasantry. The peasant leaders were more dedicated to the peasant community for the cause of their welfare. Both the organizations and leadership were professional at least on matters relating to the interest of the peasant community.

When Kisan Sangh was established in Maruhiti in 2007 B.S. The Communist, non-communists, Congress and Prajaparishad members participated in preliminary discussions. Later on, the congress men boycotted it due to the infacts within the party. The Sangh was overwhelmingly occupied by the communists.

Generally, the leadership development from within the peasant community was always lacked. No effective leadership developed due to different causes. The masses of peasants was always led by the middle class leaders. It has been a popular feeling in the society that almost all movements were supported by the peasant communities to make it successful. The middle class provided leadership. The lack of leadership from within the peasant community was due to -

- Financial stringency led peasants to concentrate in substance activities.
- Suppression, exploitation and domination by the rich landlords.
- Sometimes political orientation of peasant movements. etc.



## POLITICAL MOTIVATION Vs PROFESSIONALISM

The Nepali peasants lived in most vulnerable condition. The privileged groups in the structural hierarchy exploited the peasant cultivators without considering any limitation. The end of Rana autocracy has far reaching consequences o peasants' activities in Nepal. There were series of movements against the government or individual landlords. The preliminary activities were primarily based on various demands which intended betterment of the peasantry. Basically, their demands were confined to communal demands. They primarily desired to extricate from feudal practices and its legacies. The Krishi Sudhar Sangh in the beginning put forward following demands -

- End of payment of Rakams
- Transformation of inkind payment into cash
- Land to the tiller
- Provide work, food and clothing's

All these demands are related to peasants' welfare. But when the KSS joined hand with the ANKS, the professionalism of the former gradually overshadowed by political activities and ideology. Infact the later was founded by the communist activists. It was established after a decision of the party central committee. Its' aim was clearly explained during its establishment in the following words -<sup>20</sup>

"Its ultimate aim is to eradicate all kinds of fedudalism, intervention and imperialism in the country by using peoples' economic and political power by participating actively in popular movements." This statement has major role in determining the nature of the peasant movements i.e. political motivation. The prominent founder members were devoted to the political faith they reposed on. So, there was ideological friction between communists and non-communist members. Basu Pasa was also accused of being an secret agent of the secretaries. It finally accelerated to the purification movement through the establishment of the Suddhikaran Kisan Sangh. But none of the associations remained aloof from the policies. Must of the members in the Kisan Sangh were politically motivated. So, it always became a matter of debate whether the Sangh members should be none political or not. But it is also said that the leadership at the beginning was controlled by them who could not provide actual help to them.<sup>21</sup> The political reason led to establish different peasant organizations, But later, such organizations also could not

remain aloof from politics. The political motivation overpowered the professionalism. The political confrontations remained intact. Netra Nath Sharma was also accused to be a factor to protect government interest in the Suddhikaran Sangh. While an attempt was made to pass its manifesto without prior discussion it accelerated the conflict and led Basu Pasa, Batukrishna and Yudha Prasad Mishra to left the Suddhikaran Kisan Sangh.<sup>22</sup>

The ANKS since its inception, stood against feudalism and imperialism. It criticized all kinds of imperialism and supported popular movements. They organized mass demonstrations to support leftist movements in Peru, Nicaragua, Angola, and other countries. They also lauded their voice against the - British - Gorkha recruitment. The notable factor is that ANKS members were communist party activists. Thus, they remained a part of the Nepal communist party in political matters.

The royal takeover of 1960 also pushed affiliated professional organizations to activate itself in political activities. The professional interest became secondary. They put forward all kinds of demands of peasants organizing demonstrations through the country. Before 1960, they demanded.<sup>23</sup>

- To establish schools in villages.
- To provide medical facilities in villages.
- To maintain law and order.
- To lower exorbitant rates of interests and
- To create employment opportunities.

In addition to these demands, following demands were often added in the list.<sup>23</sup>

- Grant full Civil liberty.
- Repeal all oppressive laws.
- Life ban on political parties.
- Release political prisoners.
- Close Gorkha recruitment Center, and
- Repeal all unequal treaties.

- In the policy level also, the peasant associations also framed non-professional demands such policies included-<sup>25</sup>
- 1. To support struggles against totalitarian Panchayat regime and participate actively in such activities.
- 2. To fight for political and civil rights.
- 3. Friendship with other nations on equal basis.
- 4. To struggle for economic, political, cultural and social development of backward community in the country.
- 5. To make an end of the caste system.
- 6. To fight for equal rights of women.
- 7. To fight against social evils and superstitions.
- 8. To demand for return of foreign troops.
- 9. Criticize wars and support peace.

Similarly, the slogans pronounced during the organized demonstrations also keep greater importance. The slogans contained both professional and non-professional. The popular slogans included-<sup>26</sup>

- Down with autocracy
- Restore democracy
- Down with the reactionaries
- Long live Marxism, Leninism and Maoism
- Long live unity of workers, laboures and peasants
- Down with foreign agents
- Down with the facist Panchayat and so on.

All such kinds of political motivation was imbeded upon the professional activities of the Akhil Nepal Kisan Sangh.

The political event of 2017 BS has profound impact on the political movements as well. It further pushed the ANKS into political activities. The

professional activists led the movement in which political demands were often added

to denounce the totalitarian regime. It is obvious to not that not always they fought for the cause of peasants but also fought for political purposes.

After the promulgation of the land reforms act 1964 the cultivators were given rights in land. It has brought about - significant change in the status of the peasants although it could not bring about the complete reform. The peasant activists always criticized the act for its incomplete nature

### **PEASANTS' DISCONTENT AND TYPES OF MOVEMENTS IN HILL AND TERAI**

The studies of peasant activities showed that peasant discontents are created due to prevailing situation. It seemed very much similar in various countries. Infact, the peasant movements are organized on similar grounds in South-Asian, South, East Asian and Latin American Countries.<sup>27</sup>

In Nepal, the entire peasant movements were primarily directed against the landlords and the other usurers. The constant deterioration in material condition of a section in the society ultimately leader to increased social unrest. The opprised people whose voice is not given due attention usually remains disstisfied with the existing situation. Primarily, the peasant movements during 1951 to 1960 was organized due to financial reasons. The peasants were exploited by the landowners and the moneylenders. So, they were compelled to live in most vulnerable conditions. During this period, almost all such movements basically targeted to overcome such problems and help the peasant cultivators.

The peasants in the hills and Terai were dissatifed and organized movements against the landowners. A large number of movements intended -

In Tarai generally movement were organized to-

- Oppose sharecropping
- payment of rent and levies
- Against the usurers
- Against higher rates of interests

movement for equality  
against forceful eviction  
against social injustice  
Social boycott of landlords  
Class struggle  
Stayagraha  
against compulsory savings  
Tenancy right and  
fix wages.

On the other hand, the peasants in Kathmandu and other hill regions were also dissatisfied with the existing conditions. A large number of movements were organized aiming at-

Fixing rent and taxes,  
obtain tenancy rights,  
abolish Birta & Jimidari,  
restore lost land,  
reduce rates of rent,  
against usurious rates of rent  
to oppose saving scheme,  
to cope with starvation,  
to loot crops of landowners, and  
against the usurers.

Intact, by inducing structural changes, redefining old social cleavages, and giving rise to new class contradictions create favourable conditions for the emergence of agrarian movements everywhere. The dominations of peasant-cultivators by landlords and entrepreneurs who monopolize the means of production and exclude the peasants ultimately contributed in creating peasant-discontents.<sup>28</sup> It finally developed in the form of movements. It certainly left deep mark in the history of Nepal. The ANKS is the organization which was able to articulate demands of peasants in the national scale. All these activities led to some reforms in existing land holding system.

FOOTNOTES

1. Wallinsky, 1977, Selected Papers of Louis J. Ladejinsky: Agrarian Reforms As An Unfinished Business; New York, Oxford University Press, P. 316.
  2. The Programs of the Akhil Nepal Kisan Sangh, 2052, Katmandu, ANKS, PP. 4-5
  3. Shanker Thapa, 1995, Agrarian Relations in Nepal: Owners-Cultivators in A Traditional Agriculture, (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation) Patna University, PP-64-82
  4. K.P. Sriwastav, 1955, Nepal Ki Kahani, New Delhi, Atma Ram and Sons, P-117.
  5. Ibid, P.119 (F.n - 4)
  6. Ibid,
  7. Andre Beteille, 1974, Agrarian Social Structure, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, P- 171.
  8. .... - The first association of this kind was the Krishi Sudhar Sangh established by Padma Bahadur Budhathoki in 2007 B.S. It was a professional organization which gradually transformed to the Suddhikaran Kisan Sangh. Later on, it was converted into a fullfledged political party known as- the Socialist Peasant Party.
  9. .... - The split in the Communist parties at once splited in affiliated professional organizations such as the Kisan Sangh. The Nepali Congress has no such an affiliated organization to work for peasants.
- For splits in the Communist party - See- Surendra K.C., The Communist Movement In Nepal, (Unpublished

- Ph.D. Dissertation) Tribhuvan University, 1995, PP-194-224.
10. Programs of..., op cit (f.n. 2), pp-9-15
- Election Manifesto of the NCP-UML 2048 and 2051 B.S.
  - Election Manifesto of the Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party, 2048 & 2051 B.S.
11. Dristi (weekly) - 13:1, Marga 2052, p - 4.
- 12..... - There were ten units under the proposed Suddhikaran Kisan Sangathan, and twelve branches in each unit.
- The Circular of the Nepal Communist Party 2016 cited from:
- Puspa Raj Chalise, 2051, Role of Bhaktapur in the Democratic Movement of Nepal 1940-1990 (In Nepali), Kathmandu, K.L. Udaya, PP. 60-61.
13. Election Manifesto of the Nepali Congress 2015, Kathmandu, Nepali Congress - Publicity Dept, 2015 B.S. P.
14. Election Manifesto of the Nepali Congress, 2048, Kathmandu PP. 11-15.
- 15..... - In recent times the programmes of the Nepal Communist Party (UML) is regarded most logical than that of the policies of the Nepali congress. They tried to introduce reforms in the land systems They tried to work as they promised.
- \* Constituted a high power land reforms commission (2051-52). It prepared and submitted report to the government.
  - \* Distributed land to landless people/
  - \* Rent reduction etc.

- Also see: ■ Election Manifesto of the NCP (UML)  
2048, Op cit, (f.n. -10), pp-11-14
16. An interview with Arjun Bahadur Thapa; - On 2050-4-10. Mr. Thapa informed about it while discussing about his experiences on tenancy problems in Dang, Sunsari (Koshi Tappu), and Morang (Pathari & other villages) where he served as an administrative officer in the land commissions formed under the leadership of Marichman Singh (Sunsari), Ganesh Bahadur Khatri (Morang) and Hem Bahadur Shrestha (Dang).
17. Interview with Basu Pasa - 2052-8-4.
18. Ibid,
19. Basu Pasa, 2044, Pharkera Herda, Kathmandu, Pasa Prakashan, p-91.
20. Manifesto of the Akhil Nepal Kisan Sangh And its Policies, 2047, Kathmandu, ANKS, pp. 3-4.
21. Interview with Basu Pasa; 2052, 2052-8-4.
22. Ibid,
23. Dristi, - Loc cit, (f.n. 11)
24. Manifesto of the ..., - Op cit, pp. 56-57.
25. Manifesto ...., - Op.cit, (f.n. 24) pp. 58-59.
26. Mukti Morcha, - 10, n.p., Ncpm2, Sept. 1979, p-42
27. For Latin American Examples:  
See:- Leon Zamosc, Agrarian Question And Peasant Movements in Coloumbia, Struggle of the National Peasant Association, 1967-1981  
- London, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp-34-50.
28. Ibid, - P-1.