
UNIT 5 FREEDOM MOVEMENT AND QUEST FOR LAND REFORMS: CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

The study of this unit will enable you to:

- understand the role of Indian national movement in land reforms;
- explain the contributions of Indian National Congress in land reforms; and
- study the strategies adopted by the government towards removal of exploitative system.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Land tenure system, as we have studied in the previous Block, has been gradually evolving in India over a period with the changes in regimes and their rulers. Differing reigns brought with them different philosophies and thoughts having their implications on the land tenure system and the people related to these systems. Changing from the ancient period to the medieval India and subsequently to the colonial rule, Indian land tenure system has witnessed multitude of transformations, directly or indirectly affecting the rural masses in general and agricultural productivity in specific.

The policies of the British government had the most direct impact on revenue and agrarian systems in India. When the experiment of Warren Hastings to auction the right to collect revenue to the highest bidder failed during 1773-1785, the permanent revenue settlement system, also commonly known as the *zamindari* system, was introduced in Bengal and Bihar in 1793 by Lord Cornwallis with the help of Sir John Shore. This led to exploitation and suppression of peasants by *zamindars*. This was followed by the *ryotwari* settlement system in Madras Presidency by Governor Thomas Munro in 1820.

In this system, the land revenue fixed was exorbitant, the government had retained the right to enhance land revenue whenever it wanted, and the people had to pay revenue despite partial agricultural production or total failure of crops. This again led to exploitation of the people in the hands of the state, leading to upheaval and gross discontentment amongst the masses. This anger and resentment among the people across the country gradually led to their uprising and revolt, taking the shape of popular and historic movements that changed the course of modern Indian history and history of land reforms in India.

We will, in the subsequent sections in this unit, try to get an insight into the various movements and their impact on land reforms, and study the role of Indian National Movement in this rural awakening that led to further changes in the system and mitigation of the exploitative system.

5.2 INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND LAND REFORMS

Let us begin with the study of those national movements in the pre-independence period in the colonial period that have influenced the land reforms of the country.

5.2.1 Movements and Struggles towards Land Reform (1757-1856)

The uprising and struggle towards land reform during the post 1757 period can be broadly classified into three main categories according to the regions to which these movements took place.

a) Bengal and Eastern India

- i) ***Sanyasi Revolt:*** The establishment of British rule in Bengal after 1757 and its implications for the economic policies led to devastating condition of *zamindars*, peasants and artisans. This coupled with famine in 1770 and restrictions imposed by the British government on the local people to visit holy places estranged the *sanyasis*, leading to *sanyasi* revolt. The *sanyasis* were joined by large number of starving peasants, evicted landlords and disbanded soldiers. By 1772, there was a great *sanyasi* rebellion encompassing a wide belt from Rangpur to Dhaka. Under their brave leader Manju Shah Fakir, the *sanyasis* defeated a company of *sepoys* and killed the commander. They overran Bogra and Mymensingh districts, levying contributions on landlords and virtually running a parallel government. In 1773, the British suffered another disastrous defeat in the hands of *sanyasis*. This rebellion continued till the end of the 18th century. Only after prolonged military action, the then Governor General Warren Hastings could control *sanyasi* raids. From 1800, it is speculated that the *sanyasis* probably joined the Marathas in their war against the British.
- ii) ***Chuar and Ho Rising:*** Famine, enhanced land revenue along with economic distress, goaded the chuar aboriginal tribesmen of Midnapur to raise their arms against the British. The Ho and Munda tribesmen of Chhota Nagpur and Singhbhum also raised their voice against the movement and this disturbance caused by this movement continued from 1820 to 1837.

- iii) **Kol Rising:** This rising was against the British policy of transfer of land to outsiders. The Kols of Chhota Nagpur resented the transfer of land from Kol headmen (Mundas) to outsiders like Sikh and Muslim farmers. This rebellion spread to Ranchi, Singhbhum, Hazaribag, Palamau and western parts of Manbhum.
- iv) **Santhal Rising:** These risings were against the oppression of police, atrocities of landlords and moneylenders, ill-treatment of small farmers by land revenue officials in the area of Raj Mahal hills. The rebellion started in 1855 under the leadership of Sidhu and Kanhu who declared the end of Company's Rule in the area and declared themselves independent. The government could pacify these Santhals by creating a separate district of Santhal Parganas.
- v) **Pagal Panthis and Faraizis Revolt:** Pagal Panthis, a semi-religious sect formed by Karam Shah, took up the cause of tenants against the oppression of *zamindars* in the northern areas of Bengal. Tipu, the son of Karam Shah openly took up their cause against the oppression of *zamindars* who realized illegal cases from the peasants. He persuaded the followers not to pay rent above a specified minimum amount. The government alarmed by the strength of Pagal Panthis' uprising, conceded Tipu's demands and made a more equitable arrangement to protect the cultivators. The affected areas remained disturbed from 1830s to 1840s and this uprising was finally suppressed after massive military operation against the protesters. The Faraizis were followers of a Muslim sect founded by Haji Shariatullah of Faridpur in East Bengal. This sect supported the cause of tenants against the exploitation of the *zamindars*. The area was disturbed from 1838 to 1857.

b) Western India

- i) **Bhil Risings:** The Bhils and aboriginal tribes living in the Western *ghats* with strong hold in Khandesh revolted against the East India Company during 1817 to 1819. Agrarian hardships and fear of the worst under the new regime led to this revolt.
- ii) **Revolt of Ramosis:** The Ramosis of Maharashtra were the inferior ranks of police in Maratha administration. After the fall of the Maratha kingdom, because of Anglo-Maratha war, they had to go back to their agricultural land for their livelihood, but they had to pay heavy land assessment and revenue putting them to great distress. Chittur Singh revolted in Satara in 1822 to protest atrocities over the cultivators. Ramosis under his banner played a prominent part in creating disturbance and destroying its forts. In 1825, chronic scarcity in Deccan further encouraged them to break out into a revolt under the leadership of Umaji in 1826. Ultimately the colonial government condoned their crimes, gave them land grants, and recruited them as hill police.

c) Revolt in South India

Revolt of Poligars: The Poligars of Dindigul and Malabar took up arms against the British land revenue system during 1801 to 1805. The Poligars of the Ceded districts and North Arcot revolted against the policy of company. These sporadic risings continued in Madras Presidency upto 1856.

1.2.2 Peasant Movements and Struggles (1857-1947)

- i) **Indigo Movement (1859-60):** The movement that cultivators launched was due to many reasons. The principal reason was to force the British government to concede to their economic demands. The Indigo movement is the largest and a more rigorous movement against the atrocities of the Government. It was a direct fight of the cultivators against their exploitation. The largely European planters used totally arbitrary and ruthless methods to force peasants to grow the indigo crop on a part of their land in eastern India. The peasants were kidnapped, illegally confined, women and children were attacked, and crop was looted, burnt, and destroyed if the peasants did not obey. The privileges and immunities enjoyed by the British planters placed them above the law and beyond all judicial control. By 1860, these oppressed indigo peasants launched non cultivation of indigo movement. It started with Govindpur village in Nadia district and rapidly spread to other neighbouring areas and by 1860, the whole Bengal was in the grip of this movement. The most important factor of this movement was that it got support from the intelligentsia, the press, and the missionaries of Bengal. Besides, there was complete Hindu-Muslim unity in this movement. In November 1860, the government issued a notification that the ryots could not be compelled to grow indigo and that it would ensure that all disputes were settled by legal means. This was great victory for the indigo peasants. This was the first strike of Indian peasants, and it was successful. This indigo movement was a source of great inspiration during India's struggle for freedom.
- ii) **Pabna Agrarian Unrest (1873-76):** Most of the areas of Bengal, especially the East Bengal, were under the grip of cultivator unrest during 1870s because of the Permanent Settlement System. The *zamindars* used crafty methods to deprive the *ryots* of their occupancy rights which were granted by the Act of 1859. Among these methods were enhancing rents beyond legal limits through a variety of cesses (*Abwab*), shortchanging in measurement, costly legal affairs and forced eviction. In reaction to this high handedness of the *zamindars*, the peasants of several districts of Bengal launched a movement during 1870 to 1885. In May 1873, an agrarian league was formed in Pabna, a prosperous jute growing district, to resist the unjust demands of the *zamindars*. The Pabna league raised funds to fight legal battle against the *zamindars* and organized nonpayment of rent campaign. The overall objective of this league was that the resistance should be legal and peaceful. The first noteworthy feature of this unrest was that it provided a sound platform to the peasants at a time when there was no kisan sabha or any political party to organize the peasants. Secondly there was a complete unity between the Hindu and Muslim communities even though majority of the *zamindars* were Hindus while majority of peasants were Muslims. This unrest resulted into Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 which did not fully protect the tenants from the *zamindari* oppression, but it gave rise to a powerful *jotedar* groups, some of whom turned out to be as exploitative as the *zamindars*.
- iii) **Deccan Riots (1874-75):** In the *ryotwari* areas of Pune and Ahmadnagar of Maharashtra, the land revenue was very high and it had to be paid even when there was bad crop in succession. In the meantime, there was a boom in the export price of cotton due to American Civil War in 1860. In 1864

when this war ended, it resulted into acute depression in cotton export and crash in cotton prices. Due to this situation, the peasants had to mortgage a very large part of their agricultural land to moneylenders, who were mostly Gujaratis and Marwaris. The situation became more explosive as the peasants faced brutal alternative of mortgaging land or eviction. Some moneylenders even compelled the peasants to compromise the honor of their women to get relief from their debts. This provided a spurt to riots from Sirur *taluk* in December 1874 and by September 1875, these riots had affected 33 places in six *taluks*. The object of this riot was to destroy the dead bonds, decrees, etc. in possession of their creditors. Personal violence was used only when the moneylenders refused to hand over the documents. The uprising was crushed with the assistance of military to police, and thousands of peasants were arrested. The government appointed a commission to investigate the nature and cause of these riots and it unanimously held that poverty and indebtedness of the peasants were the two main causes of the riots. On the recommendation of the commission, government passed Agriculturists Relief Act in 1879 and on the operation of Civil Procedure Code, the peasants could not be arrested and sent to jail if they failed to pay their debts.

- iv) **No-Revenue Movement:** In Assam, the British tried to hike the land revenue by 50 to 70 per cent in temporarily settled areas of the districts of Kamrup and Darrang. This was resisted by village assemblies which enforced non-payment of revenue as a social boycott of those who decided to pay because of which they gained some concession in land revenue from the administration. A similar no-revenue campaign was launched in Maharashtra after the outbreak of famines of 1896-97 and 1899-1900 under the auspices of Poona Sarvajanik Sabha. These campaigns spread to Surat, Nasik, Khera and Ahmedabad. A revolt of peasants who were threatened by moneylenders with loss of their land took place in Punjab towards the end of 19th century. This led to assault and murder of moneylenders by the peasants. This resulted into the enactment of Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1902 which prohibited for 20 years transfer of land from peasants to moneylenders and mortgage.
- v) **Champaran Indigo Satyagraha (1917):** The cultivators in Champaran district of Bihar were forced by European planters to cultivate indigo on 3/20th of their land holding popularly known as *tinkathia* system. Under this system, European planters holding *thikadari* leases from the big local *zamindars* forced the peasants to cultivate indigo on part of their land at un-remunerative prices and by charging *sharahbeshi* (rent enhancement) or *tawan* (lump sum compensation) if the peasants wanted to be exempted from the obligation of growing indigo. The peasants refused to either grow indigo or pay illegal taxes. In 1917, Mahatma Gandhi launched an agitation and demanded a detailed enquiry and redressal of grievances of the peasants. Faced by the success of this agitation, government appointed an enquiry committee which recommended the abolition of *tinkhatia* system and payment of compensation to the peasants for illegal increase in their dues which was accepted by the Government.
- vi) **Kheda Satyagraha (1918):** Because of a severe drought in the Kheda district of Gujarat, the peasants appealed for remission of land revenue which was ignored by the Government. Gandhiji launched no-revenue

campaign in Kheda along with Sardar Patel. After a hard struggle, Government issued orders directing that revenue should be recovered only from those who could pay.

vii) ***Kisan Movement:*** The 20th century witnessed pathetic conditions of peasantry because of the following reasons.

- Lack of occupancy rights on land in many regions.
- Exaction by landlords of tributes, cesses, gifts, forced labour and excessive rent.
- Periodic revision of land revenue in ryotwari areas.
- Heavy indebtedness to the village land lords or money lenders.

Coupled with these reasons, the outbreak of World War I added to the problems of the peasants. There was steep rise in the price of food grains benefiting middlemen and merchants at the cost of the poor. Further after War, Government encouragement to *Talukdari* and *zamindari* made a lot of peasantries miserable in UP. Some leaders of Home Rule League like Gauri Shanker Mishra and Indra Narain Dwivedi with the support of Madan Mohan Malviya organized the peasants under the banner of *Kisan Sabha* in 1918. A notable contribution was made by Baba Ramchandra towards organizing the peasants of Awadh against the landlords. Up to 1920, the peasant movement of UP got associated with Non-Cooperation Movement launched by the Congress. Due to differences of opinion between the supporters of Non-Cooperation and those who preferred constitutional agitation, led to the setting up of Awadh Kisan Sabha (AKS) in October 1920. This *Sabha* united 330 grassroots, *kisan sabhas* under its umbrella. The AKS persuaded the peasants to refuse to till *bedakhli* land, not to offer unpaid labour, boycott those who did not accept these conditions and solve their disputes through Panchayats. By 1921, this movement turned militant and spread to districts of Eastern UP. The agitators raided the houses of landlords and moneylenders, looted bazaars and granaries and there were clashes with the police. The violent edge of the movement got a break with the amendment of Awadh Rent Act in 1921.

viii) ***Second Moplah Uprising (1921):*** The oppression and exploitation of Muslim Moplah peasants of Malabar (Kerala) by Hindu *zamindars* (*Jemnis*) and the British government was the main cause for Moplah revolt. It started in 1921 when police raided Tirurangadi mosque in search of arms. This sparked off major rebellion with attacks on police stations, public offices and houses of oppressive landlords and moneylenders. The gravity of the situation can be analyzed by the fact the British government lost control over Ernad and Walluvanad taluks for several months. The rebellion was suppressed brutally by British. This movement was termed as anti-British as well as anti-Zamindars and, to some extent, as anti-Hindu, as most of the local zamindars were Hindus.

ix) ***Bardoli Satyagraha (1928):*** A no-revenue campaign was organized by the Bardoli peasants under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to oppose the enhancement of land revenue by 22% in the Bardoli district of Gujarat. Under this agitation, the peasants refused to pay land revenue at the enhanced rates. Under the pressure of the movement, Government was forced to reach a settlement based on a judicial

enquiry and return of confiscated land. A result of the Maxwell-Broomfield Enquiry was that enhancement was rescinded and land revenue was reduced from 22% to 6.03%.

- x) **Other Peasant Movements during 1930s:** The period of 1929-30 witnessed the Great Depression resulting into the crash of agricultural prices while rents and taxes remained high, impoverishing the peasants. This resulted into small scale peasant movements in various provinces of India. The peasants of Gujarat, especially of Surat and Kheda, refused to pay taxes and went on *hizrut* (migration) to Baroda state to escape repression. In Bengal and Bihar, peasants launched agitation against *chaukidari* tax. By 1931, no-revenue movement had started in some of the districts of Karnataka. In Maharashtra, efforts were made to influence the village chiefs not to pay their revenue to government by inducing their tenants to withhold their rent. A powerful no-tax campaign in Chattarpur state of Bundelkhand and in the Punjab against Maharaja of Patiala was also witnessed. Peasants in Hissar district refused to pay rent and forcibly seized the crops of landlords. Even in Kangra, the peasants showed defiance of forest grazing regulations.
- xi) **Organization of Kisan Sabhas:** As we have already seen a Kisan Sabha was formed in Awadh province in 1920 and Kisan Sabha, or associations were formed in other provinces on the similar lines. The Andhra Provincial Ryots Association was started in 1928, followed by Bihar Kisan Sabha set up by Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. Since all the sabhas were scattered in different provinces, it was felt that a Kisan Sabha at the national level should be formed as an apex organization of Indian peasants. The first All India Kisan Congress was held at Lucknow which led to the formation of Kisan Sabha in 1936 with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati as its President and N.G. Ranga as General Secretary. From 1936 onwards, All India Kisan Day was celebrated on 1st September every year. A Kisan Sabha manifesto was launched which included protection of peasants from economic exploitation, demand of 50% reduction in land revenue, security of tenure for tenants, living wages for labourers, recognition of peasant unions, abolition of *begar* (forced labour) etc. The Sabha also launched struggles in different parts of India such as Movement against oppression of zamindars in Andhra Pradesh, abolition of zamindari system in Bihar and UP, movement against oppressive forest laws, etc.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Space is given below for each question for your answer.

ii) Check your answer(s) with the text.

1) Choose the correct answer:

i) Kheda Satyagraha took place in the year

- a) 1920 b) 1918 c) 1856
d) 1892

2) What were the basic reasons behind Kisan Movement?

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3) Why did the sanyasis revolt against the British Rule in Bengal?
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5.3 INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND QUEST FOR LAND REFORMS

In this section, we will study the role of Indian National Congress (INC) towards reducing the exploitation and oppression of the peasant community of the country. This will be discussed under two basic heads, firstly, role of INC when it formed ministries in the different provinces and secondly, resolutions passed at different sessions of the Congress.

5.3.1 Popular Congress Ministries in Provinces and Peasant Movements

- i) **Congress Government in Bihar:** The peasants had a lot of expectation from the provincial government. To focus attention on their demands, thousands of peasants gathered around Bihar legislative assembly on the opening day of the assembly. The Kisan leaders sought to persuade the Congress Government to implement some remedial measures for the peasant class. This resulted into restoration of Bakasht Land Act and Bihar Tenancy Act in 1938. The Government also made tenants, holdings transferable without prior consent of zamindars and reduced the salami rates. Rents were reduced by 1/4th on an average. The Kisan leaders had expected that the Congress Government would establish Kisan Raj in the province which meant abolition of zamindari system and redistribution of land among the landless. But the Congress Government in Bihar was backed by the zamindars and zamindari abolition could not be legislated against.
- ii) **Congress Government in UP:** The Congress party in UP was much more left oriented than its counterpart in Bihar which reflected on the legislation of tenancy bill. However, could not be implemented as Governor did not give his assent to the Bill even after two years of its passage. Statutory tenants of Awadh were raised to the level of hereditary occupancy raiyats, enhancements were restricted, and rents were somewhat reduced by the government in UP.
- iii) **Bombay Province:** In Bombay province, the Congress was successful in getting restored to their original owners those lands which had been sold because of no-rent or revenue campaign during Civil Disobedience Movement. Khoti, sub-tenants of ryotwari land holders, were given some rights. Forest Satyagraha found partial fulfillment in the abolition of grazing fees.

Besides the above efforts, in Kerala, the Congress Socialist Party and Communists had setup peasant associations (Krishak Sangathan) demanding an end to feudal levies, renewal fees, advancement eviction, etc. They also

organized a campaign towards amendment of the Malabar Tenancy Act. In coastal Andhra Pradesh, peasants were mobilized for getting debt relief, which was successful as the same was incorporated in the legislation passed by the Congress ministry. In Bengal, agitations were launched against Canal Tax in Burdwan and *Hat Tola* Movement in north Bengal against a levy collected by the landlords from peasants at Hat (weekly market). In Punjab, a united group of Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Kirti Kisan, the Congress and Akali activists under the direction of Punjab Kisan Committee, launched an agitation against the Union Ministry dominated by landlords of western Punjab for resettlement of land revenue and against increase in canal tax and water rate. Because of these, they won some concessions.

From the above, we learn that in all the provinces, efforts were made to protect the peasants from moneylenders and improve the irrigation facilities. But in most of the areas the zamindars remained in a dominant position.

5.3.2 Resolutions Passed in Congress Sessions

The significant contribution of the Congress towards improving the condition of peasants against the oppression and exploitation by zamindars and moneylenders, emanates from the Faizpur Congress Session in December 1936 in which a resolution was passed to draw up an All-India Agrarian Programme. It was discussed in the session, where it was emphasized that the important and urgent problem of the country is poverty, unemployment, and indebtedness of the peasantry. The solution to these problems was identified as removal of British imperial exploitation and radical changes in the land revenue and tenure system. A thirteen-point programme was suggested which demanded reduction in rent and revenue, exemption from rent on uneconomic holdings, lowering of canal and irrigation rates, fixity of tenure in rural debt, living wage for agriculture labour and recognition of peasant associations, introduction of cooperative farming and wiping out of rent arrears.

5.3.3 Peasant Struggles on the Eve of Indian Independence

Three significant peasant struggles on the eve of Indian independence were Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, Telangana Outbreak in Hyderabad, and Varlis Revolt in Western India.

- i) **The Tebhaga Movement** was a peasant struggle involving lower stratum of tenants such as bargardars (sharecroppers), adhiars and poor peasants etc. This struggle was not only against the zamindars but also against the section of rich peasants (jotedars), moneylenders, traders, and British bureaucracy. The main centres of Tebhaga agitation were Dinaspur, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Mymensingh and Midnapore. The Bargadari Bill introduced by Suharwardy's Government afforded some relief to the rent paying tenants.
- ii) **The outbreak in Telangana** during 1946-51 was launched in the territory of Nizam's state of Hyderabad against exploitation and oppression of landlords, moneylenders, traders and nizam's officials. The movement was linked to the States People Movement under the leadership of Praja Mandal and had the sympathy of the Congress, the Arya Samaj, etc. The role of the Communist Party in organizing the peasants was very significant. The

peasants of Telangana and adjoining areas of Madras state continued their struggle. The movement was withdrawn in October 1951.

- iii) **Varlis Revolt in Western India:** The revolt of Varlis, tribal people of Western India, was a struggle against exploitation of the forest-contractors, the moneylenders, the rich farmers, and the landlords who were supported by the British bureaucracy. The Kisan Sabha understood their demand and launched a struggle in May 1945. The police action could not terrorize the Varlis who later on came under the influence of the Communist ideology.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Space is given below each question for your answer.

ii) Check your answer(s) with the text

- 1) What were the initiatives taken by Congress Government in Bihar?

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- 2) What were the important peasant struggles that took place on the eve of Indian independence?

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5.4 STRATEGIES TOWARDS REMOVAL OF EXPLOITATIVE SYSTEM

After attainment of independence in 1947, the Government of India initiated several steps towards rationalization of land and abolition of revenue intermediaries so as to have transparent revenue administration, leaving less scope for exploitation of peasant communities. The steps taken by the Government of India can be classified into three basic directions: ceiling on land holdings, tenancy reforms and rationalization of land tenure system.

- a) **Ceiling of land holding:** A resume of different legislative measures initiated towards ceiling of landholding is given below and the statement showing distribution of ceiling of surplus land is given in Table 5.1:
- i) **Ceiling on future acquisition:** Specific measures under legislative enactments were adopted by almost all the states regarding future acquisition of land. This step was relatively less thorny and less controversial and was futuristic in nature. Different ceilings were imposed in future acquisitions by different states, for instance in UP, it was 12.5 acres, in Punjab and Haryana 30 acres, in West Bengal 25 acres, and in Rajasthan 30 irrigated acres or 90 dry acres, while in rest of the country ceiling was widely divergent.

Table 5.1: Distribution of Ceiling Surplus Land as on 31st March 2002(Area in acres)

Sl. No.	States	Area Declared Surplus	Area Taken Possession	Area Distributed to Individual	Total No. of Beneficiaries
1	Andhra Pradesh	799663	641655	582319	540344
2	Assam	613400	575377	545870	445848
3	Bihar	415447	390752	306964	379528
4	Gujarat	227404	160801	139853	32308
5	Haryana	107487	103017	102123	29228
6	Himachal Pradesh	316556	304895	6167	6259
7	Jammu and Kashmir	455575	450000	450000	450000
8	Karnataka	268478	161834	123204	33610
9	Kerala	141427	96851	68745	166814
10	Madhya Pradesh	298763	260323	186942	74705
11	Maharashtra	740002	670449	642835	140850
12	Manipur	1830	1685	1682	1258
13	Orissa	179176	167253	156948	139595
14	Punjab	223115	105834	104232	28574
15	Rajasthan	611096	569211	461847	81808
16	Tamilnadu	200920	191628	181295	143683
17	Tripura	1995	1944	1598	1424
18	Uttar Pradesh	374125	341464	258698	294062
19	West Bengal	1383852	1294739	1064044	2651619
20	D&N Haveli	9406	9305	6851	3353
21	Delhi	1132	394	394	654
22	Pondicherry	2326	1209	1070	1464
	Total	7373175	6500620	5393681	5646988

Source: Annual Report 2003-2004, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

- ii) ***Ceiling on existing holdings:*** This was more problematic as it led to taking away land from people with influence and giving it to people with no influence. This led not only to wide differences in legislation from state to state, but also to disparities in implementation and in enforcement within a state. The ceilings that have been fixed are as follows: Andhra Pradesh (Telangana area) 18 to 270 acres, Assam 50 acres, Bihar 20 to 60 acres, Gujarat 19 to 132 acres, Jammu and Kashmir 23.8 acres, Kerala 15 to 37.5 acres, Madhya Pradesh 25 to 75 acres, Tamil Nadu 24 to 120 acres, Maharashtra 18 to 126 acres, Mysore (now Karnataka) 27 to 216 acres, Orissa 25 to 100 acres, Punjab and Haryana 30 standard acres, Rajasthan 30 standard acres, Uttar Pradesh 12.5 acres and West Bengal 25 acres.
- iii) ***Payment of compensation:*** Compensation was to be paid in some states based on assignment of land revenue, while in others based on land rent.

- iv) ***Distribution of surplus land:*** Tenants displaced because of resumption of land by landowners for personal cultivation, farmers having uneconomic holdings and the landless labourers, were to get preference in the distribution of surplus land on completion of the programme of acquisition in particular area. Under the pre-revised ceiling laws, nearly 7.6 lakh hectares were declared surplus and distributed among the landless. With the implementation of revised ceiling laws, nearly 15.12 lakh hectares had been declared surplus by December 1980. Out of this, 9.96 lakh hectares were taken into possession and about 6.95 lakh hectares land had already been distributed to nearly 12.16 lakh beneficiaries, of whom more than half were persons belonging to the depressed communities.
- b) **Tenancy Reforms:** The need for tenancy reform in India was very acute because on one hand, output from the land was very low, while on the other, it was substantially eaten up by a chain of intermediaries and zamindars. The actual abolition of intermediaries started in 1948 when Madras (now Tamil Nadu) enacted enabling legislation. Thereafter, state after state followed suit until all the states had legislated the abolition of intermediaries, mainly the zamindars, except for a few states like Assam, Gujarat, Madras and Maharashtra. Madras, Bombay and Hyderabad enacted suitable legislations in 1949-50, followed by Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Assam in 1951; Orissa, Punjab, Swarashtra and Rajasthan in 1952; Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal in 1953; West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, and Delhi in 1954-55. As a result of the conferment of the rights, about 30.4 lakh tenants and sharecroppers acquired ownership rights over a total cultivated area of 62.2 lakh acres throughout the country. To be precise, all intermediary tenures like zamindaris, jagirs, imams, etc. which covered more than 40% of the area were abolished and around three crore farmers were brought into direct relationship with the state. The states also took over wide areas of waste land and privately owned lowlands and forests and distributed the same mainly to the landless peasants. Table 5.2 gives some idea about the number of tenants who were conferred ownership rights (or rights protected) and areas accrued to them.
- c) **Rationalization of Land Tenure System:** After Independence, middle layers of peasantry (other than zamindari houses and belonging to high and other backward caste across the region) gained the most from the zamindari abolition and other land reforms. A significant portion of the landowners emerged belonging to this higher rural social stratum. The character of this section of agrarian structure is important in understanding the nature of agricultural growth and regional and intra regional disparity in the spread of Green Revolution. Wherever such structural transformation has not taken place in terms of distribution of landholding, in the hands of actual cultivating sections, landlordism, absentee landowners and share cropping dominate the agriculture production regime. However, land reform measures have, to a degree, done away with large and inefficient landholding. This coupled with security of ownership rights made available to non-zamindari cultivating non-dominating castes, has provided opportunities for the creation of small surplus, which is no longer siphoned away by the intermediaries. The peasant caste has specially gained from this development. It is this social structural transformation of rural India which has been the major achievement of the land reform measures. However, a need is still being

felt for refocusing the land reform towards asset-less rural population. If we have to revamp and rationalize agrarian economy, there is a need to give a fresh look on reformulating the landholding rights.

Table 5.2: Number of Tenants Conferred Ownership Rights and Area Accrued to Them

S. No.	States	No. of Tenants (Lakh Acres)	Area Accrued (in Lakhs)
1	Andhra Pradesh	1.07	5.95
2	Arunachal Pradesh	System not prevalent	
3	Assam	29.08	31.75
4	Bihar	NR	NR
5	Gujarat	12.76	25.92
6	Goa	NR	NR
7	Haryana	Nil	Nil
8	Himachal Pradesh	4.01	NR
9	Jammu and Kashmir	6.1	NR
10	Karnataka	6.05	26.32
11	Kerala	28.42	14.5
12	Madhya Pradesh	Tenancy not prevalent	
13	Maharashtra	14.92	42.9
14	Manipur	NR	NR
15	Meghalaya	Nil	Nil
16	Mizoram	Nil	Nil
17	Nagaland	NR	NR
18	Orissa	1.65	0.98
19	Punjab	NR	NR
20	Rajasthan	0.18	NR
21	Sikkim	NR	NR
22	Tamilnadu	4.98	6.95
23	Tipura	0.14	0.39
24	Uttar Pradesh	NR	NR
25	West Bengal	14.6	NR
	Union Territories		
26	A.N. Islands	Nil	Nil
27	Chandigarh	NR	NR
28	D&N Haveli	0.26	0.64
29	Delhi	NR	NR
30	Daman and Diu	NR	NR
31	Lakshadweep	Neg	Neg
32	Pondicherry	Neg	Neg
	All India	124.22	156.3

Tenancy not prevalent in Haryana, NR: Not Reported.

Source: Annual Report 1999-2000, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Space is given below for each question for your answer.

ii) Check your answer(s) with the text

- 1) What were the initiatives taken by the Government of India towards land reform in post-independent era?

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- 2) Name the Indian states where areas distributed to individual, total number of beneficiaries were the highest amongst all the states?

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5.5 LET US SUM UP

Movements and Struggles towards Land Reform during 1757-1856 are classified into three broad categories, namely, Bengal and Eastern India which includes Sanyasi Revolt, Chuar and Ho Rising, Kol Rising, Santhal Rising, Pagal Panthis and Faraizis Revolt; Western India which has the following uprisings: Bhil Risings and Revolt of Ramosis; and finally, the Revolt in South India that is mainly characterized by the Revolt of Poligars.

The peasant movements and struggles during 1857-1947 is known for Indigo Movement (1859-60), considered to be the largest and the most rigorous movement against the atrocities of the Government. It was a direct fight of the cultivators against their exploitation, Pabna Agrarian Unrest (1873-76), Deccan riots (1874-75), No-Revenue Movement in Assam, Maharashtra, and Punjab (towards the end of 19th century), and Champaran Indigo Satyagraha (1917). Besides, popular Congress Ministries in provinces such as Bihar, UP and Bombay also contributed towards the struggle of peasants against exploitation of zamindars and other intermediaries.

Apart from the above initiatives taken by the Congress governments in states, resolutions were also passed in Congress Sessions towards improving the condition of peasants against the oppression and exploitation by zamindars and moneylenders. In the Faizpur Congress Session in December 1936, a resolution was passed to draw up an All-India Agrarian Programme. The peasant struggle on the eve of Indian independence mainly includes Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, Telangana Outbreak in Hyderabad, and Varlis Revolt in Western India.

However, after attainment of independence in 1947, the Government of India initiated several steps towards rationalization of land, abolition of revenue intermediaries to have transparent revenue administration and leave less

scope for exploitation of peasant communities. These steps were in three basic directions, namely, ceiling of landholdings, tenancy reforms and rationalization of land tenure system.

5.6 KEY WORDS

Cess	:	Tax or levy.
Province	:	Region, area or state.
Levy	:	Tax, charge or duty.

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