

## Rahul Sankrityayan on Peasant Issues: with Aspect of their Social and Economic Questions

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### ABSTRACT

An important contribution to the realm of Indian literature and its historical evolution has been made by Rahul Sankrityayan. Specifically, his immense contributions to Buddhism turned out to be a turning point in the growth of Buddhism in contemporary India. Rahul was a man who wrote on multidimensional topics in which philosophy, politics, history, social and cultural issues were important. He was also a great wanderer and the main purpose of his wandering was to collect more and more knowledge and information on related places. From all his contributions his socio-economic approach was also tremendous. Rahul was not an absolute religious person but an intellectual socialist. In his writings, he is more realistic than idealistic because in most of his writing he presents contemporary conditions of India. He was aware of the peasants' issues during 20<sup>th</sup> century and he continue took part of those movements especially during the decade of 1930s. He actively participated in that movement as a writer and also as an activist. He wrote different literature on the socio-economic issues and also presented ideas for the progressive society.

**Keywords-** Indian Feudalism, Revenue system, Self-sufficient village, peasant movement.

Rahul Sankrityayan (9 April 1893–14 April 1963) set out on his journey with the intention of reaching enlightenment and refining his language and Dharma skills. During his first trips, he studied Sanskrit in several locations in North India, including Varanasi, Agra, Haridwar, and the hilly region of Uttarakhand. He lived in *Pārsa Math* (Chhapra, Bihar) as a *Vaishnav mahant* for a while (1912-13) and found a new name, Ramudar Das. After Parsa, he traveled to South India and became a disciple of *Mathādheesh* of Tirumishi (1913) with the new name *Dāmodarachāri*.<sup>1</sup> After that, he became *Arya Samāji* and followed Dayanand Saraswati. When he went to *Arya MusāfirVidhyālaya*, Agra (1914) for his academic education, and became a member of *Arya Samāji*. In 1915 he completed his Sanskrit studies from *Arya*

*MusāfirVidyālaya*, Agra, and in 1916 he reached Lahore for higher Sanskrit education. It was the period when he studied religion, philosophy, language, and history. With that, he also got involved in the missionary work of *Arya Samāji*. During his Missionary work in Lucknow, he met *Bhikkhu Bodhananda* and was impressed with Buddhism. The Buddha's theory of compassion and equality attracted to him. After a deep reading of the Buddha's teachings, he became an atheist. After working a lot for the revival of Buddhism in India Rahul also participated in the Indian peasant movement. We can easily see his connection with the farmers issues in his writing also.

Rahul was concerned about the exploitation of a big section of society. A huge number of populations were worked for the enjoyment of feudal class and for the fulfillment of their luxury goods and it was also continued until the English government. He says that the exploited masses had forgotten their free-classless, economic slavery-less days. They were considering their

<sup>1</sup> Prabhu Narayan Vidhyarthi. (2000), Rahul Sankrityayan Unchhue Prasang, Bihar Hindi Granth Academy, Patna. p.5

present situation as 'justice of the god', falling into different rituals of religion. He explains that there were few revolutionaries who struggled against exploitations but their voice was very low. Since the last century, this voice has been increasing. At this time, how big a philosophical revolutionary would have had to live within his limits because if he did not do so, he would have been crushed by the monarchy because at that time the system of peace arrangements was very large by the state.<sup>2</sup> For thousands of years, those who raised their voice against the atrocities, those who dreamed of a new society of oppression free, must have been born, although their number was small, their voice was weak but with the increase of exploitation, this voice even as it continued to grow higher, as long as that sound was unrealistic and it did not get the strength. But within one century it has changed.

Rahul opposed to the Varna system of the previous social hierarchy because he disliked social inequity. He therefore makes the case that Indian society should eradicate this constrained impulse. In Indian history, social superiority and economic wealth coexisted, with religious organizations always giving precedence to those with political and economic might. Rahul described the traditional Indian social classes, such as traders and guilds, as capitalist. He added, although this appears to be very nice, if someone were to hit their slogan of *lābha* (profit), they would have forgotten all about the concepts of brotherhood and peace. By all means, he wishes to convey the idea that the Indian bourgeoisie presents himself as charitable as long as he continues to make money; if not, he takes on a more authentic shape. They constantly seek to profit, but workers always carry out the work. He claims that if we all continue to act this way, our nation will not be progressive and we will not be able to create a society that is equal in fairness. Rahul was an excellent historian who also provided social and political context for historical events. He concluded that the monarchy did not desire that and that the King was questioned about fundamental matters. He claimed that religious clerics were used by the monarchy to sway people's attention away from social and economic problems and towards religious matters.<sup>3</sup>

Agriculture was a state issue in the early era of Indian history. Land distribution began during the *Satavahana* period and picked up some steam during the Gupta era. Later on in the Gupta era, more land was distributed and allocated to specific groups, such as feudatories, monasteries, and Brahmin temples. Additionally, entire villages were awarded. Feudalistic model theory is supported by historians such as D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, D.N. Jha, B.N.S. Yadava, and

others. At that time, feudalism gained control over both administration and income collection. Later period it became hereditary also. A new type of 'sub-infeudation system' was started by the feuds that care land in place of the previous one. A new intermediary emerged in the Indian economic system. There are different concepts of feudalism and its impact on the economy in India. With the time the burden of revenue on farmers was increased continuously. The fertility rate of the land was good but *Zamindārs* and their employees cruelly controlled the land revenue system. Due to the heavy revenue, many of the peasant groups were not able to continue their occupation and they revolted and few became robbers also. We know that in India, the agrarian relation of the rural system depended on feuds or *Zamindār's* policy of revenue collection and the peasants could not have the right on the property. A large amount of the production was also grabbed by the upper class political and social powers of the name of political kinship and social hierarchy and the system of *Iqta* and *Jagirdari* system was supported to self-sufficient village economy and political system both. Later the Mughal period the emergence of local political rivals was the important result of this self-sufficient village system. The system resulting from the central kingship was not important to local peasants.

Under British rule, the conditions were bad to worse. The company experimented with a new system of land revenue in 1762. It was open for public auction. It was a profitable step to the English company and resulted as the permanent settlement. The settlement was worse for Indian peasants. After taking land through auction *Zamindārs* were resold or auctioned off that land and by the process, a new type of another hidden *Zamindār* group was created. It also imposed a huge burden on peasants. Other land Settlements were also for the collection of high land revenue. All agrarian groups were distressed by the policy of high revenue. Few peasant movements in India were emerged in British period against their policy of high revenue. According to Friedrich Engels 'the last decisive factor for history is the production and reproduction of real-life goods, economic condition is the basic factor of the theory but the other political, legal, philosophical and religious questions affect the historical conflicts.'<sup>4</sup>

For the agrarian issue Rahul gives example of *Tulsidās's* quote that he says, *कोउ नृप होइ हमें का हानि* |<sup>5</sup> The implication is that, as the ordinary peoples in the villages were responsible for their feuds rather than the central ruler, the shift in central authority throughout the mediaeval era had little effect on them. Their sovereign right was inherited by the feud. According to Rahul, the general public's autocracy would have been harder to oppose if rural India's democracy had already been split

<sup>2</sup> Rahul Sankrityayan. (1948), *Bauddh-Darshan*, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, p.143

<sup>3</sup> Rahul Sankrityayan. (1959), *Kārl Mārx*, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, Vishay pravesh, p.123

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.424

<sup>5</sup> Rahul Sankrityayan. (1940), *Mānav Samāj*, Adhunik Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, p.322

apart and maintained as an institution.<sup>6</sup> So the village and farmers were not included with in the sentiments of the state. With the change of political orders and policies villages affected more and more.

Rahul mentions Marx's view on Indian closed village organizations and their bad impact on the economy and state development and says that, "we should not forget that the village organization, no matter how innocent it may appear, has always been the solid foundation of Eastern autocracy. Rahul was a big admirer of progressive ideas in society as well as in economy so he clearly shouted on the closed type of economic system. He said that, the old village structure confined the human mind within its smallest boundaries, and made it the silent instrument of false belief, enslaved it to the old laws, and deprived it of all the great historical powers."<sup>7</sup> According to him the increasing of rights and duties among the social groups was a major reason for the closed economy. Rahul says that individualism and ancient rural attitude in India is an obstacle in the formation of an organized society in modern times.<sup>8</sup>

Rahul Sankrityayan worked for the peasant's movement and became popular as 'Rahul Baba'. During the days in Congress, he did different social activities. But for a long time, congress did not do anything new for the freedom movement. Rahul diverts to Buddhism and visited Saranath and after that, he went to Sri Lanka. It was a milestone in his life. Rahul Sankrityayan was a founder member of the 'Bihar Communist Party' in 1939 and started his struggle for peasants from Ambari village, Chhapra, Bihar. He worked on three main aspects of his personality, as a writer, as an activist, as a philosopher. As a writer, he wrote many texts which were directly or indirectly connected with the problem of peasants like *Vishwa kī Rūprekha*, *Darshan-Digdarshan*, *Vaigyanik Bhōtikvād*, *Bhagō Nahi Duniyā kō Badlō*, *Tumhāri Chhaya*, *Satmī Ke Bachhe*, *Pānch Nātak* and *Teen Nātak* in which he explains the problems in Villages economy and peasants also. As an activist he worked at ground level he lives for a long period with peasants and understands their problems. He pointed out the problem of 'Hari-Begāri' an agricultural activity in which peasants were under the control of local *Zamindārs* and the *Zamindārs* forced the peasant to plow on the *Zamindārs* land without any wage. He worked for it and connected himself with class struggle. He also connected anti-colonial activities with his peasant activities. He got arrested during Amaravati Kisan Satyagraha in April 1939. As a philosopher he used a method for this movement first he gave a new term 'Kisān Satyāgraha' in place of peasant movement. Rahul's *Satyāgraha* for peasants was different from others because of his enhanced social thinking which

was influenced by communist ideology and his own experience. When he started his work for peasants of Bihar then the permanent settlement was implemented there. The exploitation of peasants was at the peak. In Congress, there were particular numbers of *Zamindārs* and other Indian Capitalists communities. Rahul was also elected as president for the Palasa (Andhra Pradesh) Session of *Akhil Bhārtiya Kisān Sabhā* in 1940. Rahul did a great work for the upliftment of peasants by the participating in different peasant movements. He took those issues and problems in his literature also.

Rahul was also against of social evils in India because according to him it was also reason for economic backwardness. Peasant class was a big part of Indian society and social evils were also affected that class. Rahul was against of these evils like caste system, child marriage, slavery, the problem of prostitutes and also unmatched marriage. He was aware of the administrative problems like corruption. He did not believe in the implementation of the idealistic way of truth and non-violence. According to him, socialism is the real medicine of capitalism and it is not the result of the generosity of a particular person. He invokes the revolution for the three communities of the society that were, capitalist, feudal and priestly system, etc. He discusses also the blind faith and Godship theory which overlapped needs to the responsibility of the society.

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- [8] *Ibid*, pp.332-33

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pp.325-26

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp.332-33