

# Role of Ganapat Sahay in Kisan Movement of Sultanpur

## Abstract

Sultanpur is Part of Oudh region which had been ruled by Nawabs. British rulers annexed this region on the ground of maladministration. Sultanpur was having vast fertile land with high demand of revenue. Peasants of the area were hard working and loyal to local leadership. British intervention in revenue system created intermediaries in a large number. They Plundered peasants in several ways. Revenue settlements could do nothing for their betterment so, peasants started movement against the government. Local leaders Baba Ram Chandra, Baba Ram Lal gave voices to peasants cause. DCC under leadership of Ganpat Sahay agitated against several taxes. Finally Talukedari system was abolished along with zamindari system in 1952.

**Keywords:** Talukedari, Kolhuwana, Thekedari, Occupancy, Tenants.

## Introduction

Oudh region deserves credit not only as the starting point of the revolt of 1857 but as the people of the region fought heroically against the alien rulers also. Although the outbreak of the revolt had been subdued immediately but the people continued to oppose alien rule till independence. British authorities had dethroned Nowab Wajid Ali Shah. So people of Oudh were fighting for four objects. First, they wanted independence, second self rule, third restoration of the Nawab and finally they were struggling against alien revenue misadministration, specially the method of collection was resented. The Benthamite land revenue settlement had annoyed the landed magnates because they had lost many villages. When revolt broke out the talukedars atonce took possession of villages from which they had been ousted by the settlement. The tenants accepted the suzerainty of talukedars. British authorities were surprised of this behaviour of tenants.'

During and after revolt British authorities came to know and began to acknowledge the importance of landed aristocracy of oudh. They felt that they could no longer ignore the Talukedari system of land revenue.<sup>1</sup> By 1858 prominent talukedars were not only restored but were given judicial powers. By the oudh compromise of 1868 talukedars gave special privileges to some cultivators with regard to occupancy rights. It was not the liberal attitude of talukedars but was a measure to strengthen their hold on land. The oudh rent act 1868 debarred the courts from interfering in the matter of rent payable. By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century the typical talukedari estate was large one, small estate owners were called zamindars. The zamindar of oudh was the owner of only one grade of proprietary interest. Generally those estates were called Zamindari which were outside the extent of Talukedari areas.'

The peasants under this system were mainly of two kinds first who had occupancy rights, they comprised only one percent of total peasantry'. Secondly those who had no occupancy rights, they were called tenants-at-will and were absolutely at the mercy of land lords. Their rents could be raised periodically and arbitrarily. Land lord was free to evict them from their holdings at pleasure. All this had made the situation of tenants pitiable. Peasants had no option than to work as agricultural labourer. In case of rent hike he was bound to look towards village Bania or Mahajana for loan. Under the threat of eviction tenants desisted from making improvements on land. Sometimes they were bound to relinquish their holdings. This practise was usual with the low caste tenants because they were unable to pay hiked rents and were unwilling to take loans from Mahajans. Only in few cases rent was reduced.<sup>2</sup> The system of appointing thekedars for managing estates of thekedars had for reaching effect on peasantry. Thekedars had a keen system of keeping some thing for themselves after paying off the dues to talukedars. So there was all round demand reform. Vernacular press was most vociferous and was quoting N.W.P. Act XIX of 1868 (oudh was under the Governor of N.W.P.)<sup>3</sup>

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Oudh rent act of 1886 was passed repealing the oudh rent act of 1868. Tenants at will were upgraded to statutory tenants. Their occupancy was secured for seven years term\*/ at the end of period talukedar could either enhance the rent or evict the tenant. The rent enhancement could not exceed one anna in a rupee of the previous rent. It was same in the case previous tenant as well as with New- tenant after eviction. The notices of eviction were liable to payment of heavy court fees. Tenants were made free to appeal for reforms at holdings before Deputy Commissioners. At a stage it was acknowledged that the Act had somewhat redressed the peasant grievances but soon land lords found loopholes in the half hearted act of 1886. They began to force tenants to relinquish their holdings. In some cases land lords and tenants entered into contract without going to court. Another way devised to beat the law was the conversion of grain rents to cash rents.<sup>4</sup> Most natural and frequent method of eviction was a land lords demand for arrears of rent. Enhancement of rents were given another from in the Name of Nazarana. Some tenants were forced to commit the heinous crime of Kanya vikray or sale of daughters to bribe the land lords.<sup>5</sup>

The Government paid only lip service to Oudh rent act even though rents were enhanced beyond legal limits. Govt did nothing to pull up the guilty talukedars. Lt. Governor Hewett said "It is for more important to retain the goodwill of Talukedars than to start an enquiry which may have the effect of putting the whole oudh into a blaze" This attitude of Govt, intensified agrarian crisis. Land lord began to charge other cesses over the peasantry: Ughani Pagahani/Hari/Begar, Kolhuwana Hathiana. Motorana and Such many other taxes came into existence.<sup>6</sup> Although oudh tenancy act 1921 was passed to restrict the exploitation of peasants: But like other previous halfhearted Acts, it also could restore and manage nothing good for the benefit of peasantry. With the National movement gaining momentum it became imperative for colonial control to be applied through land lords. Govt, found it politic to make concessions to land lords interest. Land lords obliged the Govt, by accepting tenancy Acts. II

By 1920, Economic conflict between different groups had been become acute. It was waiting for New Leadership which can redress the grievances of peasants. The growth of land market, rising in the letting value of land, commercialization of agriculture and a high rate of revenue demand led to proliferation of karinda and thekedar rule and economic dominance of the estate owner and Bania.

National movement under leadership of Mahatma Gandhi was gaining Momentum and D.C.C's were organized through out oudh and rest of the country'. Although congress was unwilling to take the issue of peasants by that time but peasants had had a separate leadership which was closely associated with their cause. Baba Ram Chandra, Baba Ram Lal, Swami Sarwesh Ji organised peasants and gave voice to agrarian grievances. Swami Sarwesh by singing his own poems and Ram Chandra by using Ram Charit Manas asked the peasants not to pay illegal cesses. Ram Chandra was active in Pratappgarh, Jaunpur, Sultanpur and

Raebareli district of oudh.<sup>7</sup> Where as Baba Ram Lal and Swami Sarwesh were confined to Sultanpur. With the effort of these leaders peasant's movement had taken a certain shape and class identity was much more established. At this stage D.C.C. was formed at Sultanpur under the leadership of Ganapat Sahay, a local youth of high qualification. He mixed the congress programmes with peasants movement.

Ganpat Sahay was born on 10 October 1885 at civil lines Sultanpur. His father Ram Sahay belonged to a Simple family so he obtained primary education at Sultanpur. For Higher education he joined Mayo college Allahabad, and acquired Bachelor Degree with distinction marks for which he was awarded Jalan Gold medal. Even at Degree qualification he was appointed as lecturer in English and European Languages. Thereafter he obtained Bachelor of laws Degree and Joined national movement, which had gathered momentum after the separation of Bengal.<sup>8</sup> Ganapat Sahay became active in political life as well as social life of the nation. This was why he was appointed chairman of D.C.C. and Rama Kant Singh its General Secretary. Earlier he had worked as a legal advisor of local Kisan Sabha, Which has been established with undaunted effort of Ram Chandra. Kedar Nath, Dev Narayan Pandey and Baba Ram Lal. He had Accomplished better reputation as Kisan Worker rather than a man of law. When N.C.M. was started by legendry Mahatma Gandhi, Ganpat Sahay like other leaders wished Kisan Movement to be tackled by the formers. As Gandhi was not inclined to raise peasants issue at that time, some leaders became active in NCM. Ganpat Sahay was one of them. When Jawahar Lal was having thorough survey of Pratappgarh. On the Guidelines of Congress Ganpat Sahay also toured through out district. Hindu Muslim Unity, Setting foreign clothes ablaze boycott of foreign goods were the main issues to be discussed. Ganpat Sahay addressed several meetings at Sultanpur (2<sup>nd</sup> December) Pratappur (4<sup>th</sup> December) Baruaripur (5<sup>th</sup> December) Tiary Hasanpur Shahabaganj, Baldiray, Raikunti, Bazaarshukul (6th December). After these meetings Kisan of District began to Organize but Ganapat Sahay was arrested with Baba Ram Lal and Nazim Ali. After a year he was released from Jail. A crowd of more than 500 men welcomed him at the railway Station. All this proved his popularity not only at District level but at province level too. Ganapat Sahay came on backfoot and left temporarily the politics. In 1924 he again became active in politics and was elected chairman of Municipality. Hence forth he was active in Khadi and Charakha Programme of Mahatma Gandhi. It was an attempt to enlarge the base of Indian national Congress among masses. In 1929 Mahatma Gandhi visited the district he was warmly received at Victoria park. Here under the leadership of Ganapat Sahay congress workers assembled in a large number and donated 3416 Rupees. He became chairman of the district board in 1931 and established a girls school in the name of his expired wife Smt. Kesh Kumari."

A fresh wave of peasant activities in the District started in 1931- 32. By that time congress had adopted more practical attitude towards peasant problems. During civil disobedience programme

Congress got more closer to peasants. It was combined effect of Sardar Patel, Jawahar Lai Nehru and Communist Party, No rent campaign became part of Congress activities. Western part of Sultanpur witnessed its echo at first because this area was covered by small talukedars, Ramgarhi, Amethi, Jamo, Katari, Dakhinwara, Bhawanshahpur, Hargaoon and Mahona were estates, where Karindas and other intermediaries were causing havoc. The movements of Raebareilly had a positive effect in this area. Vidhyadhar Bajpai, Sunderlal Gupta, Badrinath Shukla and Ganapat Sahay called for no rent. Govt. was ready for repression, article 144 was announced and important leaders of district Mathura Prasad Baba Ram Lai and Nazim Ali were arrested. Zamindars at Bhawanshahpur arrested the peasant leaders and punished them. Local Police became instrumental in coercive activities of land lords.<sup>9</sup>

"Ibid : page 66 R.S. Pandey : District Sultanpur page 42.

In 1935-36 George V Jubilee Celebrations were on in the district, Babu Ganapat Sahay was present in the function as chairman of district board. Students were asked to sing in praise of British rule. When a student said "vadhai Rajan Barambar Des Bhakt Fanci per Chari Ge Lootat Police Tumhar" Ganapat Sahay felt sorrow and tears came into his eyes. He asked the headmaster of schools to promote patriotism among the students at school level. Henceforth a new DeshBhakti Song was introduced as prayer song. During Congress rule Ganapat Sahay raised the issue of peasants. Ram Manohar Lohia, Kedar Nath and Dr. Ganesh Krishna Jethalji visited the District. At Rupaipur Ganapat Sahay while delivering speech among peasants got arrested. He was imprisoned for 4 years. He was first political prisoner of U.P. who was sentenced for so long period. He was released premature which gave him opportunity to take part in Quit India movement. Ganapat Sahay

was interned at Devali Camp with Narendra Dev, K.D. Paliwal, P.D. Tondon and Rail Ahmad Kidwai. Its why his name was enlisted as a pioneer freedom fighter.<sup>10</sup>

In 1945 Ganapat Sahay represented Sultanpur in U.P. legislative assembly and continued to raise peasants questions. After Independence he did a Herculean job for zamindari abolition.<sup>11</sup> He pleaded in favour of U.P. Govt. for zamindari abolition. Thus during his whole political career he worked for peasants. It is significant that even as legal practitioner and chairman of district board he continued to work for the betterment of peasants.'

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