
DR. AMBEDKAR AND KHOTI PADHTI

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Abstract:

A strong economy is a prerequisite for the overall development of a nation. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in his three books 1) *Administration and finance of the east India Company* 2) *The evolution of provincial finance in British India* 3) *The Problem and of the Rupee: its origin and its solution*, presented his views related to economics. Agriculture is the foundation of the Indian economy and the backbone of the rural production. Agriculture has the major share in the Indian economy.

In 1918, Babasaheb presented invaluable views on agriculture in his article, '*Small Holdings in India and Their Remedies*'. The caste based exploitation Indian social life is evident in the various forms of agricultural systems. The exploitations of Konkan region farmers were happening through Khoti system. Khots belonged to the upper castes. Babasaheb attempted to abolish Khoti system along with other systems like lordships, bonded labour and private creditors.

The Khoti system was existent in some parts of the Ratnagiri, Raigad, Thane districts of then Mumbai region. The government had appointed Khots to collect tax from the farmers. Rice crop is grown on a large scale in Konkan region. Half share of the crop grown on fertile land and one third of the barren land were collected in the form of the tax from farmers. Khots used to compel farmers to work on their private lands without wages. The Khots had been appointed in Konkan region since the times of Aadilshaha. This system had the provision to deposit the certain amount of tax to king by Khots and remaining amount they would keep. Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had kept a check on the Khots. But the atrocities of khots increased during the Peshvai.¹ Babasaheb gave voice to the issues of farmers by addressing many ralleys. He put the proposal of Khoti Abolition in the assembly as well.

Keywords : Khoti System, Atrocities of Khots on Farmers, Kokan Prant Shetkari Sangh, Chari movement, Khoti Bill.

Research Methodology:

This Research Paper highlighting the discrimination of Khoti system in Kokan region. Information & Data about the paper has been collected from the various Secondary sources such as Websites, Research articles, Govt. Reports, Journals & Reference Books.

Objectives:

- 1) To highlight the role of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on Khoti movement.
- 2) To study the thoughts of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in Khoti system.
- 3) To study the socio-economic exploitation of farmer by Khots
- 4) To evaluate the impact of Khoti movement in Kokan region

Khoti System:

Khoti system was existent in Konkan region's Thane, Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts. The Khots; appointed to collect the agricultural tax used to exploit farmers. Khots collected surplus taxes from the farmers. Additionally, they used to make the farmers work on Khot's lands as laborers. Dr. Babadaheb Ambedkar engaged a conference for farmers in Ratnagiri which was attended by Kunbis, Marathas and untouchables community members. There has been conflict going on between farmers and Khots for a long time. Farmers struggled against Khots from 1893 to 1897. Government made a bill to improve Khoti system in 1900.² But nothing positive has come of it.

Atrocities of Khots on Farmers:

British government started to check atrocious exploitations of Khots since 1864. However, it had no positive impact. On the contrary, the injustice of Khots went on increasing. It was forbidden for the 'Kuls'; the land cultivators to wear refined clothes in front of Khots in villages. The farmers were compelled to build the roof of grass bundles on their houses. It was

made compulsory to purchase the grass bundles from Khots only. Khots used to practice credit business too. The land of 700 acres out of 960 acres belonged to Khots in the Bhendval village of Uran taluka. There were 5927 Khot creditors in the Kulaba district.³

In the weekly run by Dr. Babadaheb Ambedkar, 'Janata' used to expose the atrocities against farmers.⁴

Padave was a village in Sindhudurg district, 13 miles away from Kudal is resided by the majority of population having surname of 'Parab'. The main occupation of Parab's was farming. In 1820, a farmer from Parab family had his 'Shevre' land pawned to tax collector Nadkarni for Rupees 400. After few years, before the principal amount was returned, Nadkarni put the land in possession of a creditor named Laxman alias Daji Waradkar. Later the creditor claimed the ownership of the entire Padave village. In 1911 Waradkar brought 100 armed men of Bedar community from Kanhur village of Belgaon district along with other 500 members altogether attacked the farmers. Women were harassed and the crop was looted. Daji Waradkar bullied the authorities of rural hospital Kudal and stopped doctors from treating the injured farmers. The entire incident culminated into the struggle between the villagers and creditors. The conflict was so intense that two creditors from Kunkavale and Padave villages were murdered at the hands of farmers. There was no farmer taking responsibility for the murders, judge ordered death sentence to all the farmers. Ultimately, Tipago Herle; a Dalit community member took the murders on head. The judge sentenced his death and other accused were sent for rigorous imprisonment of 10 to 29 years. To save the accused the 'Padave Bachav Samiti' was established which was presided by Shri. Ravbahadur Bole. Dr. Babadaheb Ambedkar fought the case and annulled the death sentence of Tipago Herle.⁵

Work of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar for Abolishing Khoti System:

On 14 April, 1929 Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar engaged a rally at Chiplun for farmers. He addressed the farmers and disclosed how they are exploited through Khoti system. He appealed the farmers to revolt against Khoti system. With the inspiration of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, 'Kokan Prant Shetkari Sangh' was established by Ravbahadur C.K. Bole through which many

agitations were organized for farmers. British government announced the organized on illegal. However, due to interference of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar the ban was revoked in 1934.⁶

On 16 December 1934 Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar travelled by sea route to reach 'Revas' where farmers gave him a grand welcome. N.N. Patil organized a gathering of 2,000 farmers at Chari for the Kolaba district where Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was felicitated with a huge procession. Total 6,000 farmers attended the conference. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar expressed his views on the exploitations done by Konkan Khots.⁷

On 17 September 1937, in the legislative assembly of Mumbai region, Babasaheb proposed a bill to eradicate the Khoti system which got rejected. On 10 January 1938, under the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, a huge march of 20,000 farmers was arranged by Independence Labour Party on assembly.⁸

Later, along with 20 leaders, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar met the chief minister to submit the letter of 13 demands. Following were the major demands:

1. Deciding minimum wages of farm laborers
2. Ending of land lordship system
3. Decreasing rates of canal water to half
4. Compromising on the compensation regarding ending the Khoti system.

Later the march got transformed into a rally.⁹

On 01 January 1938, at Dapoli, a conference of TilloriKunbis to call for the end of Khoti system was arranged in the chair of Raghunath DhondibaKhambe. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar sent his representatives of Independence Labour Party Mr. Anantrao Chitre and Mr. Surba Tipnis. They inspired the farmers to revolt against the Khoti system. The government filed suits against the leaders by declaring the speeches illegal. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar fought their cases in court.¹⁰

Independence Labour Party and Khoti System:

The issues of farmers were included in the manifesto of the Independence Labour Party. The disintegration of land in smaller pieces and the increasing population are the reasons of farmers' poverty. The following issues were included in the manifesto:

1. Kuls will be protected from the atrocities of the owners
2. Kuls will be protected against the expulsion by owners from the farmlands they are cultivating
3. The Kuls will get the facilities alike the industrial laborers
4. Protection from the Khots.¹¹ This indicates that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar takes a position against Khoti system.

Chari movement:

There have been atrocities against farmers in Chari village of Konkan region. The struggle against Khots increased due to the unification of farmers. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar supported the farmer's movement by delivering a speech and he also presented their side in the assembly. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had an active participation in this movement. In 1937, then revenue minister Mr. Moraraji Desai paid visit to the Chari village. Having seen the widening impact of the movement he decided to mediate between Khots and farmers but at the same time he declared that the Khoti system will not be abolished. There were suggested changes in the Kul law which was published in 23 July 1948 gazetteer.¹²

Khoti Abolition Bill was passed and was implemented from 15 May 1950. Due to which the land of 1,22,860 acres was freed from the clutches of Khots.

BILL No. XX OF 1937 TO ABOLISH THE KHOTI SYSTEM - Statement of Objects and Reasons:

1. The Khoti System is one of the minor land tenures in the Bombay Presidency. It is found mostly in the Ratnagiri District and in some parts of the Kolaba and Thana districts.
2. The terms of the Khoti Tenure are in some cases regulated by law, in some by custom and usage and in the rest by grant. In the Ratnagiri District the terms are regulated by Bombay Act I of 1880. In the Kolaba District the terms are regulated by custom and usage and in the Thana District by grant.

3. The Khoti Tenure differs from the ordinary Rayatwari Tenure in as much as in the latter the Government collects revenue directly from those who are in occupation of the land while in the former the Government is required to employ the services of the Khot for collecting revenue.
4. The system of Khoti Tenure while it binds the Khot to pay revenue to the Government leaves him free to do what he likes to the inferior holders and this freedom has been so grossly abused by the Khots that the inferior holders are not only subjected to all kinds of exactions but they have been reduced to a state of abject slavery. In recent years the inferior holders have been carrying on a great agitation against Khots and have been demanding the abolition of the Khoti system. The relations between the Khots and the inferior holders have been so strained that three Khots were murdered by them.
5. While the Khoti Tenure may have the advantage of facilitating the collection of revenue its disadvantages are so great that the Tenure cannot be allowed to continue hereafter without causing grave disturbance to the peace and tranquility of the Presidency. It is therefore imperative to abolish the system.¹³

The Bill aims:

- 1) To abolish the Khoti System and to establish direct relationship between Government and those who are in possession or occupation of the land this is under the management or beneficial enjoyment of the Khot,
- 2) To make provision for the payment of reasonable compensation to the Khot for the loss of his rights
- 3) To give those inferior holders who are in actual occupation of the land the status of occupants within the meaning of the Land Revenue Code and (4) to provide for other incidental purposes.¹⁴

With this bill, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar destroyed the Khoti system and protected the farmers from exploitation.

Conclusion:

Khots had been appointed since the times of Aadilshahi to collect taxes land. The Khots used to do the business of crediting money too. Most of the land of the Kulaba district (Raigad) was under the possession of Khots. There had been a continuous conflict between Khots and farmers. British government would always take the side of Khots due to which hundreds and farmers got killed. However, the issue got exposure after the murders of Khots. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar supported the struggle of farmers against the atrocities of Khots and he further provided them the protection of law. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar annulled the punishment given to Tipago Herle. In 1937, Babasaheb led the huge march of farmers on the assembly. He also presented the bill of abolishing Khoti system. He addressed the gatherings of farmers against the Khot system at Dapoli, Revas, Chiplun, Chari, etc. Due to the intensity of the agitation at Chari Mr. Moraraji Desai had to intervene. Babasaheb included the issue regarding Khoti system in the manifesto of Independence Labor Party. The eminent personalities like Ravbahadur Bole, Narayan Nagu Patil, Suraba Nana Tipnis, Bhai Ananat Chitre took part in the movement. Due to the success of the movement against the Khoti system, innumerable farmers got freed from the clutches of the Khoti system. Many of the farmers did not belong to Dalit communities. Due to the comprehensive fight led by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar farmers won the freedom from the bondage of Khots which the farmers should always remember.

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