

The Reason Why Bengali Peasants Participated the Khalifah Movement

LAN Jiang^{[a],*}; YAN Lin^[b]

^[a]Associate Professor, History and Culture College, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

^[b]Postgraduate, History and Culture College, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 10 March 2015; accepted 5 May 2015

Published online 26 June 2015

Abstract

For a long time, Chinese university history textbooks used by history-major were mostly likely to analysis the reason of the Khalifah movement from the perspective of politics and religion, which was just an explanation from the sponsors' view and did not concerned with the participants in the movement. Although the World War I ended in 1918, Bengali peasants' lives get worse and worse instead. Together with the Indian nationalists' agitation, peasants finally participate in the Khalifah movement. As well, the cruel rule of British India government over Bengali peasants was a necessary but not a sufficient condition to promote the exploited peasants involving in the Khalifah movement only but all conditions fully met. Also, these terms and conditions were sufficient ways to ease or prevent peasants involving the Khalifah movement.

Key words: British-India; Bengali peasant; Reason

Lan, J., & Yan, L. (2015). The Reason Why Bengali Peasants Participated the Khalifah Movement. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 8(6), 11-15. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/7110>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7110>

INTRODUCTION

After World War I, British-India fighting against British colonial rule was in the air, and soon later Indian Muslims took part in the ranks of the Caliphate movement too. The Caliphate movement, a typical event happened during the

British-Indian fighting, had an important impact on the later peasant movement in Bengal or even in British-India. And for a long time, Chinese university textbooks used by history major students had mostly likely to analysis the reason of the Caliphate movement from the perspective of politics and religion, such as Mr. Qi Shirong had pointed out in the World History (Modern History series) that:

In 1918, in order to oppose the British partition plan on Turkey, Muhammad Ali and Sal Ali Carter Brother, the famous Indian Muslim activists and Congress, set up a defending caliph (Turkish Sultan, Islam religious leader) committee and launched a politics and religion movement, as reason for the Caliphate movement opposing British colonial rule. (Qi, 2012, p.161)

This view was just an explanation from the sponsors' view and did not concern with the participants in the Khalifah movement. In short, few Chinese university textbooks in world history major in China now specialize in explaining the reason why Bengali peasants involved in the caliphate movement. According to this, Bengali peasants would be chosen as an object to analyze why mass group involved in the Khalifah movement. By doing so, maybe we could understand the complex reasons for why Indian Muslims would like to take part in the Khalifah movement.

1. THE BACKGROUND OF THE BENGALI PEASANTS TOOK PART IN THE KHALIFAH MOVEMENT

In the early 20th century, seemingly the harsh system of exploitation was to promote peasants' participation root caused of the Caliphate movement, but as self-sufficient peasants, they did not enter the market and have not much business sense. So the production was mainly to make a living.

Peasants were living in hunger. They could not be able to resist any invasion of disasters. World War I was ended in 1918; the British government celebrated the victory of the imperialists.

The British government did not take any ways to improve the situation of the working people. (Lin, 1984, p.476)

In the case of a threat was posed to their survival, the peasants were forced to embark on rebel. This article is intended to start from the background to understand the necessary conditions for peasants to revolt and analyze the sufficient condition for peasants who were participating in the movement.

Bengal, developing with slush downstream from Himalayas melting snow and soil erosion led by heavy rain, has many rivers. They converge, diverge and converge continually in the river, marshes and lakes, and finally deposited fertile soil, which were fit to plant rice and jute. In addition, rain and seawater affect the ecological environment of the region too. Dry climate make seawater intrude inland conversely, submerge low-lying areas and then lead to the areas full of seawater. "In summer, Bengal is an amphibious place. Flooding, heavy rainfall and storms at sea will hinder all of the discharge, and ultimately led to the outbreak of the flood." (Von Shendel, 2011, p.6) It evoked a variety of secondary disasters, restricted peasants' cultivating life in a large degree.

"While the whole Bengal had an urban population of about 4 per cent, it was only about 2.5 percent in 1921." (Taj Ul-Islam Hashmi, 1992, p.35)

Out of the total of 28.8 million acres of land in the region, excluding Sylhet and Chittagong Hill Tracts, more than 20 million acres—70 %—were controlled by the ryots and under-ryots by the early 20th century. By 1921, about 87.03 per cent of the cultivators were occupancy-ryots, about 8.74% composed the landless and semi-landless peasants rose quite substantially—by then about 47.29% of peasant rose quite substantially—by then about 47.29% of peasant families had less than two acres of land in the region. (Ibid., p.37)

In addition, most of cultivators were Muslims.

The "Act of eight", a Bengal tax bill issued in 1885, said that Landlords who owe land in border could also be provided 12 sustainable year lease in rural areas, enjoy the right of fixed rate and could not be deported by holders freely. But, the bill also preserves the holders' right to raise the rent through the courts. Soon, taking advantage of the tenants' ignorance with bill, zamindars and tenure holders continue to levy threshold fee, raise the rent and seizure tenants' property. Since 1885, the power of ownership (zamindars and independent tenure holder or usury) especially huge in their rate-relations with the landlord, just like the say by

Sir Abdel Kerim Chuznavi suggested that a certain Naziruddin of Chandpur, Tippear, who had borrowed Rs 22 from local Hindu mahajan in 1915, was in 1928 asked to repay Rs 26000. Sometimes peasants borrowed paddy from the richer peasants or landlords. For each maund (about 38 kilograms) they had to repay one and a half or two maunds after harvest. (Ibid., p.44)

During this period, peasants under conditions subject to not only severed tax exploitation, but also backward

economy and deteriorating public health conditions, all restricting the development of rural areas.

Unlike the situation in north-western Indian villages, in an East Bengal village, a source of drinking water was near every homestead, but the water of the adjacent ponds and pools, or nearby rivers and creeks was not pure. During the period, tubewells were almost non-existent in the countryside. As a result the general health of the villagers was very poor throughout the region. (Bhattacharyya & Natesan, 1932, pp.34-37)

It is just from 1920 that the government began to send village officials to pay attention to their public demonstrations, making people realize the importance of public sanitation and health.

"Rainy season when farmers could not work, they have a lot of free time. After the harvest of rice in early winter, they sometimes went on 'fishing' expeditions, illustrating their 'corporate sense' and 'quasi-military' discipline." (Taj Ul-Islam Hashmi, 1992, p.28) In winter, the villagers take part in different religious and recreational activities. Muslim peasants joined to celebrate the birth of the Prophet grand events by local organizations and Ulama chaired synod. Events would discuss from the purely religious issues to political issues. In most of the time, Muslim and Hindu peasants joined local or visited minstrel theater and folk music programs. Sometimes these folk theaters also staged performances and songs which were against the British colonial rule.

In addition, the development of education played an important role in villages. Until the late 19th century, just as the cultivating classes of the Hindus—the Namasudras, could not afford any education, neither could the Muslim peasant. And, the poor classes in general were apathetic to any education, whether it was the pathshala variety or the English system (Rafiuddin, 1981, p.139). From 1906 to 1908, about 100 schools were set up and the numerical strength of the pupils rose almost 5,000 (Dalia, 1990, p.124). At the same time, Anushilan Samiti had set up national schools in Calcutta and Dhaka. Samiti's volunteers taught masses of knowledge by magic lantern at night and holiday. Anushilan Samiti also fostered the development of widespread non-academic perspective by studying books. They carry out cultural movement in Bengal. Through offering free national education to peasants and promoting cultural propaganda which was further against the British colonial rule in India movement.

2. THE SUFFICIENT CONDITION FOR THE CALIPHATE MOVEMENT

2.1 The Impact of Price Fluctuations of Jute and Rice

Although the August 1914 outbreak of war in Europe did not immediately implicate in the defense of India, but as part of the British Empire in India was implicated naturally went in, and

he made a brilliant contribution to the victory. It not only sent troops, their dependents delivery of goods, is also responsible for the one hundred million war debt. (Sinha & Banerjee, 1973, p.1038)

During the War, it is benefit to the further development of the Indian jute industry has created very favorable conditions. Demand for jute products is very high. The sharp rise of jute price, however, the price of raw jute almost unchanged, or even below pre-war levels (Diakov, 1972, p.44).

In rural areas, due to lack of means of transport and merchants dominated the market prices of agricultural products were low. Peasants got the benefits of rising food prices, but to promote the merchant's speculation. Due to the extremely serious charge rent tax, plus many provinces experiencing famine in recent years, resulting in abnormal rampant usury, peasant indebtedness is more serious than before the war. (Line, 1984, p.476)

As the rise and fall in the prices of jute and rice did not take place correspondingly, the state of despondency of the lower peasantry can well be imagined from the reports of an increasing number of violent incidents of hat (village-market) looting in the country side in early 1918. In spite of the rise in jute price, the per capita net availability of rice was sharply declining during 1916-1921. In 1916-1917 while the per capita net availability was 4.81 maunds (a maund=38 kilograms approximately) per year, in 1918-1919 it was only 3.63maunds and in 1920 to 1921, it was no more than 4.65 maunds. There was a sharp decline in the total yield of rice in Bengal; in 1918-19 it fell by about half a million maunds from the level of 1917 to 1918. Consequently there was a rise in the price of rice. Taking the pre-War price of rice at 100, it stood at 162 in early 1919, 192 in early 1920 and 147 in late 1921. Meanwhile, there was a substantial decline in the jute price. In 1921, it dropped to six rupees per maund from twenty-five rupees in 1919. In 1921 there was a sharp decline in the jute production as well; from between 8 and 10 million bales in 1913 to 1919 it dropped to 4 million bales in 1921. During the period immediately following the War, on the average there was an increase of prices of almost all non-agricultural goods by about 50 per cent without any corresponding rise in wages. During the period when the well-to-do classes became even better off, the poor became poorer. (Taj Ul-Isl Am Hashmi, 1992, p.28)

2.2 Non-Agricultural Livelihoods

After World War I, a substantial decline in cereal prices hit not only peasants, labor, commerce and industry, occupational class or squire whole have been adversely affected. In 1921 Calcutta's jute factories worked only four days a week. To peasants, it was a worse thing, except agriculture and industrial and commercial goods trade with public market suddenly depressed. "By 1920 the wholesale prices of consumer goods rose by 118 percent in comparison to the pre-war period, while the retail prices rose even higher." (Ibid., p.44) Due to a significant reduction in post-war spending extra staff, low rank officials and labor, suddenly cut jobs. This caused great resentment in the lower classes of middle peasants.

These circumstances might prompt one to accept the 'bad harvest theory, which correlates economic distress with political

unrest among peasants. But one can't really ignore the impact of middle class unemployment, the political aspirations of the bourgeoisie and role of religion, as important factors which widened the 'very limited political horizon of the peasantry. (Ibid., pp.51-52)

In fact, there is no clear standard to measure urban occupations.

Most government servants, shopkeepers, factory workers, rickshaw pullers, hackney-carriage drivers and others, who stayed and worked in small towns or in Calcutta, had their families and close relatives in the village homes. They visited them during religious and family celebrations. (Ibid., p.35)

Most of them are illiterate, and few people can send their children to a neighboring town to accept the employer's education.

A Muslim educational officer confessed in 1900 that the "average pupils (in Makhtabs) after years of study fail to write letters or keep accounts correctly; the pupils of the Pathshalas after going through the second or third Bengali primers in about two years are able to write letters and keep accounts satisfactorily". (Rafuddin, 1981, p.139)

The average percentage of literates was about 8.9 in 1921. From the census Report of 1921 it appears that the number of literates among Muslim cultivators was often inflated, and even those who could just sign their name or read the Quran without understanding a word also registered themselves as literate, as some prestige was attached to literacy. The rate of literacy was the highest among the high-caste Hindus (Taj Ul-Isl Am Hashmi, 1992, p.35) The other people had the lowest rates of literacy too.

Lack of business and job opportunities for peasants that agriculture to be the only means of subsistence for most people. During this period, the upper and lower peasants, vocational classes, commercial and industrial workers, students, businessmen and landlords are not guaranteed. People who in all work of life dissatisfaction gather together to encourage them to participate in the movement.

2.3 The Impact of Indian Nationalism

Turkish surrender in 1918 after the British together with other imperialist planned to divide Turkey. "If Turkey was conquered, it would be a great grief, because it was the Islamic world's last remaining great power. We wonder that we would like as Jews, as a nation without their own homes." (Lin, 2012, p.294) "By adhering to the Muslim Caliph of religious nature, found a reason to support Turkey." (Rahim & Zaman, 1976, p.311) All India Caliph Campaign Committee, which was established in 1919 in India, intended to oppose the leadership of the British, defend the caliphate, and improve the social and political status of Indian Muslims.

"However, in rural, 'Caliph' is the word entirely new meaning. For example, peasants believe that it originated from Urdu means 'uprising', so they recognized the

caliphate movement against British rule.” (Diakov, 1972, p.73)

“By 1921 East Bengal had a population of about 29687701, the average density being 660 per square mile and the bulk of the population was Muslim.” (Taj Ul-Islam Hashmi, 1992, p.33) This is where a lot of Muslims peasants adhere to follow Ulama and other requirements of peasants in this period to support leaders of the movement, peasants paid little attention to the pro-government Ulama.

Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhury, zamindar politician from Dhanbari, Mymensingh, had failed miserably to capture their imagination despite his appeals to them to obey the law of the land in the name of God and the Holy Koran, during the Rowlatt Satyagraha in 1919. It is significant that they paid heed to the appeals made in the name of their religion, even though these appeals were made by non-Muslim communists and “terrorists” like Trailakya Nath Chakravarty was quite successful in mobilizing Muslim peasant support for the movement by telling them stories about the so-called government desire to desecrate the holy cities of Mecca and Medina by opening liquor shops. He also told peasants followed him in opposing the government’s survey and settlement operations believing him when he alleged their object was enhancement of rents. (Ibid., pp.52-53)

This showed that religion involves depression and relief factor to attract peasants.

Lower peasants could easily be good for them to change the economic conditions encouraged by rumors. These rumors leave space in them and soon to be reconciled in the countryside further exaggerated. Because of the partition ambiguous interpretation, peasants expect a fundamental change in the socio-political-economic conditions, which allowed them to achieve their “utopia” dream. “Gandhi’s foreshadowing the attainment of ‘swaraj within one year’, have aroused unprecedented expectations among the masses.” (Ibid., p.53)

2.4 The Weakening of Force

After World War I, the British India became a dominion of unfulfilled promises, and the promulgation of Rowlatt Act suppressed the national liberation movement. The Caliph committee and All-India Muslim League were immature, the old parliamentary practice was no avail, the more radical proposition was moderate hair right, India to the British government’s practice of indignation, just do nothing, Gandhi’s the non-violence uncooperative thought attracting their attention.

Gandhi’s non-violent thinking about cooperation includes four aspects:

(a) Pan-love religious political philosophy and concept of combining bourgeois humanism; (b) fight for India’s autonomy, independence, and thus establish a village-based partition Commonwealth of political thought; (c) economic justice and economic equality for ideological pillar of the rural economy, as well as the foundation for “Do not occupy” and “trust property” system thinking economic autonomy; (d) promoting national culture, emphasizing on national education, dedicated to Hindu

and Muslim unity, opposing discrimination “untouchables”, as well as small and patriotism combined production workers mutual love of equality of social thought. (Qi, 2012, p.160)

For modern Western civilization, Gandhi believed that if the development of modern Western civilization would lead to polarization and the breeding of the drawback in India. Rural farming men and women weave should be self-reliant, developing large-scale industrial production services for small; the development of urban to rural services. Gandhi understood the countryside life. Gandhi knew:

Deep-rooted ancient Indian religious doctrine determined the behavior of the Indians. Gandhi combining religion and politics, said Akagi comply with these habits would strengthen their national tradition of loving the people in general, and with it the inevitable struggle against foreign domination linked. At the same time, Gandhi thought religion could be seen as helping to keep in non-violent mass movement range of tools. (Diakov, 1972, p.61)

If you do not rely on the masses joined the movement, the Indian liberation movement would be exhaustive failure. Therefore, Gandhi tried to rely on the mass movement for autonomy under the slogan of the unity, but also opposed the class struggle. Gandhi did not propose to change the social relations in India. He did not want to reduce the worker in this situation, but he regarded the revival of agriculture manual is an important way to reduce the labor conditions. Gandhi also proposed the so-called doctrine to protect the theory of class struggle and confrontation, advocated the landlords and capitalists should care subordinate their peasants and workers, and to protect them. This initiative is that Muslim and Hindu peasant joined the movement reason.

In March 1920, Lord Zetland often referred to capture flyer contains Maulana Bari of “violence” and “fantasy” speech content. From his diary showed that after the government denounced these acts, although the Nawab of Dhaka and Fazlul Haq on behalf of the government to help mofuss externally to distribute non-cooperation movement against it leaflets, but did not play a significant role in the masses. Gandhi’s influence among the peasants ingrained, because he appeared again and again, many people believe that it could not be killed or destroyed by British colonial soldiers, believed he was God or the gods descend to incarnation. After 1920 Kolkata and Nagpur annual meeting, established the leadership of Gandhi. Since then, Muslims and Hindus in the civil disobedience of moral thought, unite together to resist the British colonial rule in India as politicians. Humayun Kabir said: “At this time, the Caliphate movement and the national liberation movement in Congress already confluence India’s Hindus and Muslims to fight their motherland.” (Diakov, 1972, p.63)

The Caliphate movement was not the only factor pushing the peasant movement culminated in Bengal. India, early in the nationalist movement boycott British

goods (Swadeshi Movement), the reason why local Muslim peasants join the movement is that tenant (proja) or kulaks and intermediaries protected them. In 1922, for the first time, beside India nationalist leader and Ulama, although Muslim elites had played an important role in the movement under the “clergy” tremendous pressure, top leader of the Muslim elite (nobility), trade and vested interests were linked, so they opposed to civil disobedience and resistance movements in late.

When peasants could independently doubt the legitimacy of the landlord, they want to change the policy rule, when the leaders of the Muslim elite also discourage their futile. It can be seen that once peasants clearly see that they can take action on safer ground, watching the big risk has been reduced, in fact, the rebels will automatically happen. (James, 2013, p.290)

CONCLUSION

In summary, in the ecologically fragile, under a public health crisis, unreasonable Land Act and national educational and religious propaganda background, it was easy to produce the necessary conditions for the peasants revolt, namely: Peasant and non-peasant life could not be guaranteed when the upper class mobilize peasants joined in the name of religion has to meet the economic needs of peasants temporarily features sport was extremely easy. Social and economic conditions get worse and worse, which was the cause behind the existence of a large number of illiterates. Bengal peasant backwardness and conservative it adhered to the “safety first” principle of survival. “Religious ideas and social awareness of peasants and the inherent conservatism of the social system of exploitation so that they think is normal, or even rational component.” (Ibid., p.290) But even in harsh environments in a strong British-Indian government control, they would not be easily onto the rebel road, if it found that the government force to be cut; the peasants would make the final for self-survival “struggle”.

Different types of peasants with different interest demands. While Gandhi played an important role in guiding the peasant movement in early, but his political

philosophy with religious ideas further divided the unity of Muslims and Hindus, in short,

“In the creation of elite social system, setbacks and threats peasants groups, especially in the cultural level, can foster social order with its own indomitable spirit to create the different moral values. It represents the initiation of another moral universe - one kind of dissent subculture, based on the real experiences of survival of moral justice, it helps its members to unite and form social groups and community values. In this sense, it was the beginning, was the result.” (Ibid., p.307)

REFERENCES

- Bhattacharyya, N. C., & Natesan, L. A. (Eds). (1932). *Some Bengal villages: An Economic Survey*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta.
- Dalia, R. (1990). *The Bengal revolutionaries and freedom movement*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications,
- Diakov. (Ed.). (1972). *Indian modern history (Vol.1)*. In Beijing Compile Agency (Trans.). Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- James, C. S. (2013). The moral economy of the peasant. In L. X. Cheng & J. Liu (Trans.). Nanjing, China: Yilin Press.
- Lin, C. J. (1984). *The rise of the national independence movement in India*. Beijing, China: Peking University Press.
- Lin, T. (2012). *A advanced history of India*. Shanghai, China: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press.
- Qi, S. R. (Ed.). (2012). *World history (modern history series)*. Beijing, China: Higher Education Press.
- Rafiuddin, A. (1981). *The Bengal Muslim 1871-1906*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Rahim & Zaman. (1976). *A brief history of Pakistan (Vol. 4)*. In Sichuan University Department of Foreign Languages Translation Group (Trans.). Chengdu, China: Sichuan People's Publishing House.
- Sinha & Banerjee. (1973). *The general history of India*. In Beijing Compile Agency (Trans.). Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Taj Ul-Islam Hashmi. (1992). *Pakistan as a peasant Utopia, 1920-1947*. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Von Shendel, W. (2011). *A history of Bangladesh*. In T. Lee (Trans.). Beijing, China: Oriental Publishing Center.