

# Indian National Congress and Eka Movement in Awadh\*

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**Abstract:** Awadh region has glorious historical background. In ancient India, Awadh region came under KaushalJanapada. According to Hindu mythology, Rama was the king of KaushalJanapada whose capital was Ayodhya which is now in Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh. This area was the heartland of Sultanat kings as well as Mughal kings because of its agriculture production. In later Mughal period, Awadh became independent state. Dalhousie conquered Awadh in 1856. And, after British control, a series of peasant's movement started in different parts of Awadh. After the establishment of Indian National Congress, peasant movements got new dimension. The discourse on peasant movements have been discussed by mainly three school of thoughts in India such as Marxist perspective, nationalist perspective and subaltern perspective. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to understand Eka movement under the umbrella of Indian national Congress.

**Keywords:** Peasant's movements, Indian National Congress, Kisan Sabha, Eka movement

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## 1. Introduction

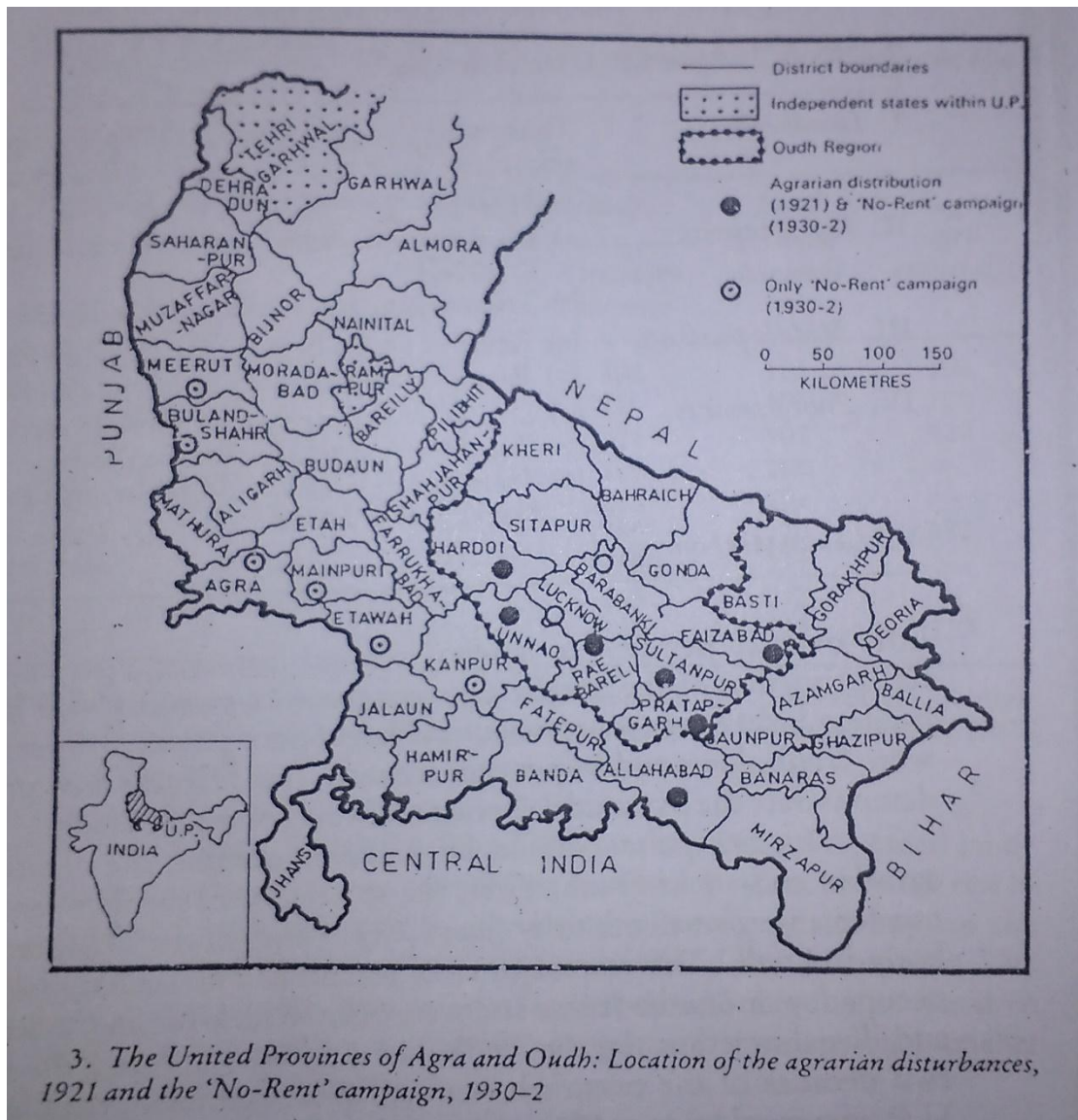
It is not that the peasant movements occurred only in colonial time. Peasant movements occurred before colonial time also but they never affected ruling powers because the rulers used to solve peasants problems but colonial government failed to understand peasants' problems. Colonial economic, social and political policies created critical situations before peasants, therefore, peasants started to oppose government. Local leaders of Indian National Congress such as Madan Mohan Malviya, Baba Ramchandra and Jawaharlal Nehru etc. gave leadership to peasant movements in Awadh. Gandhi's entry in Indian politics gave new ideological approach to the peasant movements in Awadh. The end of Non-cooperation movement in 1922, was the beginning of a new peasant movement in Awadh which is known as Eka movement. This movement was led by a lower caste leader, Madari Pasi.

### Reasons behind the peasant movements:

Any uprising does not occur without reasons. The peasant movements also happen because of some reasons. The peasant movements have occurred in different parts of the World because of various reasons. The reasons depend upon the social, political, economic and religious situation of the country where the peasant movement takes place. Many reasons have been pointed out by the scholars. Maria Halamska has that the industrial civilization creates many rapid changes in the society. This rapid change affects the peasants' civilization. Claude Servolin (1972) has argued that the capitalist mode of production affects the peasants' economy. Industrialization absorbs agriculture and creates capitalism. Servolin says that the peasant farms are operated according to two basic principles. One, peasants work in the farms and sell the products but they do not think about benefit. They do production according to their need but the

capitalist groups do production for getting benefit, therefore they do mass production (Halamska, 2004. 245-247). In western countries, the peasant movements happened mainly because of the economic and political reasons but in India many other reasons were responsible. If we see the peasant movements in Indian context, we find many reasons which were different from the other peasant movements in the world. Many scholars have written about the reasons of peasant movements in India after and before independence. The peasant movements can be categorised into three parts in independent India. First, the anti-feudal movements which occurred against the exploitation of landlords or against the state. They demanded for the land distribution and proper wages for the peasants. Second, during 1960s, the rich peasants and small farmers did the movements against the commercialization of agriculture and class differentiation. These rich farmers demanded for the policies which could benefit them. Third, during 1990s, the Indian agriculture faced crisis. The globalization of Indian economy started during this time which changed the policies of government. In this situation, the farmers started movements against the government (Pai, 2010. 392). This dissertation will focus on those reasons which were responsible for the peasant movements before independence. Many nationalist, marxist and subaltern scholars have written about the reasons of peasant movements in India. The Marxist scholars have seen the social movements, including peasant movements, from the perspective of class struggle (Dhanagare, 1983. 1). The nationalist scholars have found the reasons of peasant movements in the colonial rule. The subaltern scholars have tried to find the reasons of peasant movements within the society.

### Historical Background of Awadh (Oudh):



Note- This map has been taken from Dhanagare, 1983. 112

Awadh region has a glorious historical background. In ancient India, it was known by the name of KaushalMahajanapada. It was one of the 16 Mahajanapadas during the later Vedic period. Shatpratha Brahmin and many other later Vedic literatures give detailed account about KaushalMahajanapada. Kaushal was ruled by Shuryavanshi rulers whose ancestors were Manu and Ekshwaku kings. (Bakshi, 2009. 3-8). This region is situated between the Ganges and the Himalaya region. The total area of Awadh was about 24000 square miles and its total population was about 5,000,000. Awadh was known as 'the garden of India' because of its fertility (Lucas, 1971. 1).

The *Nawabs* ruled over Awadh for 124 years, 4 months and 24 days. When it came under colonial control, its total area was about 23 thousand miles (Singh, 2004. ix). The founder of Awadh region was Meer Muhammad Amin Sadat Khan Buhran-UllMulck. He was appointed as the *Subedar* of Awadh in 1722 and during that time he considered himself as an independent ruler. He did not take the position of king but acted as a free king. Faizabad was the capital of Awadh earlier but later Lucknow became the capital of Awadh during Ashafuddaula. Lord Dalhousie added Awadh in

British Empire in 1856 (Sharma, 2013. 223). During Sadat Khan's reign the problems of rebellious *zamindars* was solved and a new revenue system was launched by him due to which the revenue of Awadh increased to one and half per cent. Sadat Khan created a new class of rulers and *zamindars* who helped him. In this new class mainly Indian Muslims, Afghans and Hindus were the main rulers (Bandyopadhyay, 2009. 18-19).

The *Nawabs* of Awadh continued to show their faith in the Mughal sovereignty. Awadh region had 24,000 square miles of fertile soil and its population was near about 10,000,000 which made it the most prosperous province of north India. The *Nawabs* were the chief ministers of the Mughal king. East India Company continued to offer its submission to the Mughal kings up to 1856, but, Awadh came under British control in 1856. When this region came under British control, these *Nawabs* served the East India Company (Fisher, 1985. 239-241). Lord Hastings arrived in India in October 1813. He wanted to create a new political system in India. His intention was to continue colonial rule in India. He did a tour of north India and tried to understand the political situation. Awadh was very important and powerful

region of Mughal Empire. He made two policies to establish colonial rule in India. At first, he stopped giving the Company's support to the supremacy of the Mughal Empire. Secondly, he planned to support the regional powers for breaking their relations with the central power. The rulers of Awadh were the main target of Hastings' policy. The company began to advise the *Nawabs* of Awadh not to support the Mughal king. The East India Company had appointed a Resident in Awadh to encourage the *Nawab* against the Mughals (ibid. 248-252).

### Social composition of Awadh:

The *zamindars* and the *taluqdars* were the main powers of the rural areas of Awadh because they had the economic strength like landlords. The *taluqdars* of Awadh were very powerful and they were well organised. They had been given the power by the British government that their tenants could occupy the land. Some of them were in the Legislative Council and Legislation. Many Legislation were passed to protect their rights. After 1857 mutiny, the *zamindars* and the *taluqdars* were made the real owners of the land by the government. Therefore, they were loyal towards the government (Kelkar, 1975. 1989-1990). There was a hierarchy in agrarian set-up in Awadh. From the top of the hierarchy, the first were the *taluqdars*, second were the *zamindars*, third were underproprietors-occupancy tenants, fourth were the tenants-at-will and the fifth were the agricultural labourers. The percentage of tenants was 97.9 in Awadh in 1918. *Begari*, *Hari* and *Rasad* were the most exploitative taxes for the forced labourers. The wage of labourers had gone down by 2 per cent while the rents were increasing during the period from 1873 to 1903. The poor cultivators were under the debt of *mahajans* and *landlords*. The capitalist merchants also exploited the tenants. In this situation, the colonial courts were also in the favour of *mahajans*, *landlords* and the merchants. In this way the poor peasants were under great oppression in Awadh (Mittan and Kumar, 1980. 28-30). A report named 'Agricultural Indebtedness in the United Province', presented by Sir Edward Blunt in 1937, argues that agriculture was the most important industry of the united province. Blunt says, 'of that agriculture population, a huge proportion, not less than 99 per cent, themselves cultivate at least a part of the land that they hold; 96 per cent are tenants and 4 per cent are landlords' (Blunt, 1937. 676). In some parts of Awadh, like Lucknow, Hardoi and Sitapur districts, the per cent of lower caste people was very high who had very little land. The size of land was very short, therefore, the tenants were not in the position of food cultivation. These lower caste people had big families which had depended on the agriculture. In Hardoi district 16.8 per cent upper class cultivators held more than half of the cultivated land whereas 83.2 per cent lower class cultivators had less than half of the total cultivated land (Mukherjee, 1929. 15-20). In Awadh region most of the people were from lower castes. Their percentage was more than 80 per cent. This group consisted mainly, Dhobi, Nai, Chamar, Pasi, Bhangi etc. In Awadh region, Pasi community was known for its bravery. They live mainly in the central area of Awadh region like Lucknow, Hardoi, Allahabad, Faizabad etc. But this community was also divided into many communities. Pasi community has great significance in the history of movements in Awadh. Once, Pasi community ruled over a large area of Awadh

region and they were in very good position. Some important rulers of Pasi community in Awadh were like, Maharaja BijleePasi, Maharaja Satan Pasi, Maharaja Suhaldeo etc. (Narayan, 2006. 133-136). This community played a very important role during the national movement. MadariPasi was the most important leader of Eka movement which was a peasant movement in Awadh.

### Peasant struggles in Awadh and its reason:

When Indian elites were trying to give the answer to British critique of ancient civilization in India, a new rural society, at the same time, was responding against colonial government in a different way. These peasants were trying to re-establish the old revenue system which was adopted by the Mughals. It was not that peasant movements did not happen in Mughal period but these movements were not as powerful as they became during colonial government. In the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British government launched a new revenue system (*Malgujari*) which affected the Indian peasant society. We can see a series of revolts against the colonial government in the first century of colonial government. Kathleen Gough has called these rebellions "restorative rebellions". These rebellions happened because the colonial government captured the power of many Mughalrulers and *zamindars* and these rulers and *zamindars* had the full support of the local peasants. We can take the example of King Chait Singh who revolted against the government during 1778 to 1781 in Awadh. Again, in 1799, the *Nawab* of Awadh, Vazir Ali revolted against the government. These rebellions continued up to 1830s, particularly in Northern and Southern Awadh (ibid. 158-161).

There were many reasons for the peasant movements in Awadh. The establishment of British rule brought some difficulties before the agrarian classes. The new emerging Taluqdari system became the tool of oppression against the peasants. Other movements which were happening in the other parts of India and the world, became role model for the peasants. First World War also became very problematic for the peasants because of the problems of food inflation and price rise of important goods. Peasant movements happened in the various districts of Awadh like Pratapgarh, Sitapur, Hardoi, Allahabad, Unnao, Lakhimpur, Faizabad, Rae Bareili, Behraich etc.

### British rule and its Effect on peasantry in Awadh:

Awadh region came under British rule in 1856. The mutiny of 1857 happened just after one year. In this mutiny, Awadh region played very important role against British Government. After the mutiny, the colonial government created a small class of *taluqdars*. These *taluqdars* were made the owners of the land. These *Taluqdars* had to pay revenue to the government directly (Tandon, 1984. 69 and Dhanagare, 1983. 111-113). These *taluqdars* were enjoying all kinds of luxuries and western life style. Because of this, they put the burden of their high cost of living on the poor peasants. They used to take *Nazarana* (Gift payment), *Bedakhli* (Eviction), *Rasad* (Compulsory supplies) and *Begari* (Forced labour) from the peasants. *Nazarana* was the most painful tax for the peasants (Mittal and Kumar, 1978. 36). The agriculture based trade was dominated by the British traders. British not only had the major share in the



Indian trade but they also dominated the important agriculture based industries like jute, tea, cotton, etc. British businessmen took interest in the trade of Kanpur. Most of the European powers supported colonial government in India because of their interest in trade. Kanpur was developed as an industrial city because of the colonial intervention. During 1900 to 1939, Kanpur developed as an important trade city in Awadh. Because of their interest, the colonial government pressurised the peasant to cultivate cash crops like tea, coffee, indigo etc. The production of these cash-crops decreased the production of the food crops (Chakrabarti and Chatterjee, 2006. 904-909). According to Tandon, the food prices increased during the period from 1910 to 1921. The price of wheat increased by 60 per cent, bajra by 45 per cent and barley by 28 per cent. This increase in price increased the problems of the tenants and they became the agriculture worker. During the period from 1901 to 1911, the percentage of agriculture labour increased by 7.84 per cent. In this way the tenants became poorer (Tandon, 1984. 72).

#### **Taluqdari system in Awadh:**

The Taluqdari system was launched in Awadh during the time of Lord Canning. 15 March 1858 was an important day in the history of Awadh because Canning announced his proclamation about the Taluqdari settlement in Awadh. He announced, 'the property right in the soil of the province is confiscated to the British Government, which will dispose of that right in such manner as may seem fitting' (Sarvadhikari, 1882. 1). There was a provision that those landholders who were ready to surrender their land unconditionally would be secure. This proclamation declared, 'as regards any further indulgence which may be extended to them, and the condition in which they may hereafter be placed, they must throw themselves upon the justice and, mercy of the British Government' (ibid. 1). Though, this proclamation was problematic for the Indian landholder yet they did not oppose it. A British officer, Bright said about the effect of this proclamation that they overthrew the sovereign of Awadh. All the properties of the landholders were seized and most of them were sold. The government took up the power of revenue collection in Awadh (ibid. 2-4). This system was oppressive for both the *taluqdars* and the peasants. This system was opposed by some British officers like Lord Alanbara who showed his anger before Lord Canning. A member of House of the Commons, Mr. Bright said that through this system, the British had taken oppressive taxes forcefully. Colonial government treated the old land holders like their enemy. This system was opposed by many members of the House of Commons, therefore, Lord Canning organised a *Darbar* at Allahabad in November, 1858 in which some relaxations were given to the Taluqdars. But this relaxation could not satisfy the *taluqdars* (Bakshi, 2009. 56-57). The landlords had to pay revenue to the government. According to Dhanagare, the total number of tax paying landlords was 173,921 in United Province in 1920. These tax paying landlords had 100 per cent land in Awadh (Dhanagare, 1983. 114).

#### **British tax pattern in Awadh:**

Colonial government had adopted very oppressive tax collecting pattern in the United Province (hereafter, U.P.). In 1934, the total agriculture debt was rupees 103 crore on

U.P. and in 1937, the total agriculture debt was rupees 124 crore on this province (Blunt, 1937. 682). British government imposed high rent in Awadh. In northern U.P. the rent rate was 50 per cent higher than the recorded rent. The government had started share-rent pattern to collect the taxes (Vero, 2014. 3). Not only the tenants were facing problems in these areas but also *taluqdars* were also not in very good condition. The high revenue collection had affected the conditions of both, tenants as well as *taluqdars*, therefore, the taluqdars, to some extent, supported Eka movement against the colonial government in Awadh.

#### **Non-Cooperation movement and peasant struggle in Awadh:**

Indian National Congress tried to create a big mass movement against British government in India through non-cooperation movement during 1920-1921. Gandhi was the first leader of Indian National Congress who focused on the Indian mass and tried to bring them into the national movement (Kumar, 1983. 16). Awadh was an important political platform for the Indian National Congress because it did not have any political platform in Awadh, therefore, it focused more on the mass mobilization in Awadh. Gandhi, at first, came to Lucknow in 1916 and Jawaharlal Nehru came into his contact at first in Lucknow. The colonial government had created the platform for the mass movement in Awadh, and Indian National Congress, under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru, had become ready to start the movement. The starting of non-cooperation movement was the beginning of peasant movements in Awadh. Non-cooperation movement had a great impact on the peasant movements in Awadh. Most of the leaders who were participating in the non-cooperation movement, also participated in the peasant movements in Awadh. Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the most important leaders participated in both movements (Saran, 1989. 58-60). Madan Mohan Malviya was also very important leader of Kisan Sabha under which the peasant movement were happening in Awadh. Malviya actively participated in the peasant movements in Awadh (Sharma, 2004. 93-95).

#### **First World War and its effect in Awadh peasantry:**

The First World War started in 1914. It affected almost every country in the world. India was no exception to it. The colonial government used Indian soldiers in many countries in the world. According to Aravind Ganachari, the total number of army personnels was 9,85,000 during the First World War. 1,94,000 army personnels were recruited during the War. Totally 5,52,000 army personnels were sent to overseas. As far as the non-combatant personnels are concerned, their total number was 45,000 before the War period, and during the war period 14,27,000 were enrolled (Ganachari, 2005. 779). Many soldiers who belonged to Awadh region, joined Army and served during the War. After the end of the War, nearly half a million soldiers returned to Awadh. These soldiers belonged to the villages. They played very important role in spreading awareness among the villagers about the exploitative nature of colonial government. They helped the political leaders in the peasant movements (Reeves, 1966. 262). First World War was the main cause of peasants' problems because due to the War, the price of goods increased. Kapil Kumar argues, 'another important factor responsible for tenants in the rural society

of Awadh was the rise in prices of essential commodities during the First World War' (Shah, 2004. 47).

### Indian National Congress and peasant movements in various parts of Awadh:

Awadh was a very important part of United Province which consisted thirteen districts. The main districts of Awadh region were Khiri, Behraich, Sitapur, Hardoi, Lucknow, Unnao, Barabanki, Gonda, Basti, Faizabad, Rai Bareilly, Pratapgarh and Sultanpur (Dhanagare, 1983. 111). All the districts consisted very fertile land, therefore, this region was very important for the colonial government. During 1856 to 1920, the colonial government created the kind of situation in which the peasantry of Awadh started its opposition. After the emergence of Gandhi, peasant movements got a political support of INC, and they started movements against the colonial government. Peasant movements happened in various parts of Awadh during 1920s.

In 1801, the Nawab of Awadh surrendered Basti to the East India Company. Basti was a part of Gorakhpur District, which had become independent in 1865. This district had six tehsils namely Basti, Khalilabad, Harriya, Domarisganj, Bensi and Naugarh. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru visited Basti district in 1919 and the District Congress Party (DCP) was formed in 1920. Many educated youths who were inspired by Gandhi, joined DCP. Between 1801 to 1942, *Malik* class had the command on the lands because this class consisted of Rajput rajas and Thakur *zamindars*. These *Maliks* had the right to buy and sell land. Cultivators could not cultivate lands without the permissions of these *Maliks*. The wastelands like *banjar*, *usar* and *charagali* could be given to others only with the permission of the *Maliks*. Forests, ponds and ferries were under the control of these *Maliks*. The situation was intolerable for the peasants. During 1920s, the peasants started demonstration against the dominant class of this district. But any big protest did not occur in Basti during non-cooperation movement (Singh, 2000. 98-113).

Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 on national level. First, it was under the control of moderates and then after it came under the hand of extremists, but, neither of them focused on issues directly affecting the masses. Many scholars (mainly Marxists) have argued that the Indian National Congress was a bourgeois party. During the First World War, Indian National Congress passed through a transitional period. Now it turned from constitutional reform to a mass based nationalist movement. The emergence of Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, tried to fill the gap between Indian National Congress and peasantry. Jawaharlal Nehru had entered in politics earlier but he started participating actively during 1920s (Dhanagare, 1983. 116 and Gould, 1984. 2084). In 1915, the Indian National Congress realised the importance of mass contact, therefore, Kisan Sabha was formed at Allahabad in U.P. which was headed by Madan Mohan Malviya. Dhanagare argues that Malviya wanted to involve the peasants in the Home Rule League Movement. The activities of Kisan Sabha was mostly in Allahabad and its appeal was limited to the upper castes. By 1921, the colonial government passed Awadh Rent Act which provided some security to the tenants from the exploitation of *zamindars*. After the passing of this act, the peasant movements became slow in Awadh region and Kisan Sabha

engaged itself in the national movement. After a long gap, again Indian National Congress started mass agitation in Awadh in 1930s. This time Indian National Congress organised peasants through civil disobedience. The Indian National Congress adopted 'no-rent, no tax' campaign. Gandhi propagated constructive works into the villages, and sent some Congress workers to tell the peasants about the *Constructive Programme* (Dhanagare, 1983. 117-120). Gandhi started this campaign when the world was facing the problem of depression and UP was also affected by this problem. Another reason was that Gandhi could not get anything in the Second Round Table Conference in London therefore he launched no-tax campaign (Pandey, 1975. 206). Kapil Kumar argues that all leaders of the Indian National Congress such as Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abulkalam Azad, Gaurishankar Mishra and Gandhi etc. were focusing on the peasants of Awadh because they wanted active participation of peasants in the national movement (Kumar, 1983. 16).

### Kisan Sabha and peasant movements in Awadh:

The United Province Kisan Sabha was formed by some nationalist leaders who were participating in the Home Rule League Movement. Mittal and Kumar argue that the main objectives of Kisan Sabha were to check the growing opposition between the peasants and the *zamindars*, to create trust between the rulers and the masses, to establish village Panchayats to give some powers to the peasants, to spread awareness among the peasants about their social and political rights. The Kisan Sabha did not want the peasants to go out of the control of *taluqdars* and revolt against them (Mittal and Kumar, 1980. 32). In UP, Kisan Sabha played different roles in different areas. They originated as associations with the aim to work for the general welfare of the peasantry. Kisan Sabha was a part of Indian National Congress and its aim and objectives were similar to the Indian National Congress. This movement was very active during this time. The first Kisan Sabha was formed in Allahabad in 1917 under the leadership of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, the main member of this association and it was funded by Home Rule League (Crawley, 1971. 95-109). Awadh Kisan Sabha (AKS) played a very important role in the peasant movements in Awadh. The leaders of Kisan Sabha said to the peasants not to give taxes to the government. They forbade the peasants to give *bedakhli* and *haritax*. They appealed to the peasants to boycott those peasants and *zamindars* who were cooperated with the government. In December 1920, they organised a Sabha in Ayodhya which was attended by 100,000 peasants. Kisan Sabha members were from both upper and lower caste (Vero, 2014. 3). Kisan Sabha movement compelled the government to pass Malguzari Act in 1921.

### Gandhi's role in Awadh peasant movement:

Gandhi was one of the most important leaders of Indian National Congress. He came back to India in 1915 from South Africa. Gandhi began his political career from north India and did his first mass movement from Champaran in 1917. After that he moved towards another north Indian state, UP, where he took part in the peasant movements in some districts of eastern UP. He supported peasant movement in Pratapgarh and Allahabad district which were going on under the guidance of Kisan Sabha (Amin, 2009).

66-67). Gandhi was seen as a *messiah* for the peasants, therefore, Ramchandra appealed to Gandhi to lead the peasant movements in Awadh. Gandhi came to Pratapgarh district on November 29, 1920 for the council elections. He did not say any word about the peasants' problem but met the *taluqdars*. He opposed the looting incidents in Pratapgarh where many looting incidents happened by peasants during movement but he did not oppose oppression of peasants by the *taluqdars* (Mittal and Kumar, 1980. 34-37). His plan was to find a solution to remove the conflict between *zamindars* and the peasants by non-violent means (Pandey, 1978. 1077). When Gandhi visited UP in February 1921, he said that Swaraj could be attained only when everyone would follow some following rules. These rules were: not to hurt anyone, not to loot the shops, try to influence opponents by kindness, not to refuse to pay the taxes which were morally right taxes, to carry out all government order, not to oppose arrests of the leaders, to show unity between Hindu and Muslim, not to use drinks and drugs to use spinning-wheels etc. These instructions were mainly for the peasants because they were trying to use violence in the movements (Pandey, 2010. 152-154 and Mittal and Kumar, 1980. 36). Some peasants were using slogans like *jai* (hail) while doing violence. Therefore, Kapil Kumar argues that Gandhi's name was associated with the looting of markets and the property of the *taluqdars*. Peasants accused the shopkeepers that they were taking more profit from the peasants. Peasants told the traders to sell clothes at cheaper price or face consequences. Firearms were used and the peasants dispersed. This time 6 people died and 24 were injured (Kumar, 1983. 22). Gandhi was not ready to use any kind of force against the government. The Chauri-Chaura incident in February 1922, made him realise that the movement was going in a wrong direction. Violence was also witnessed in the agrarian agitations in the early months of 1921. These agitations showed that the agrarian matter was going out of control (Crawley, 1971. 95). Kapil Kumar argues that although Gandhi acknowledged the role of peasants for achieving Swaraj, "Gandhi had offered nothing for the peasantry in his programme of political action (Kumar, 1983. 17). When Gandhi launched the non-cooperation movement, he wanted to 'begin with the educated classes'. Gandhi was of the view that it was 'dangerous to make political use of peasants and workers' (ibid, 17). It means that Gandhi was not in favour of political use of peasantry and working class movements. Gandhi was always in favour of non-violence. He did not want to get success through violence. Gandhi stopped all movements including peasant movements after the Chauri-Chaura incident in Gorakhpur. He stopped the movements when these movements took violent turn (ibid, 17).

#### **Baba Ramchandra and peasant movements in Awadh:**

The real name of Baba Ramchandra was Shridhar Balwant Jodhpurkar who was a Maratha Brahmin. He went to Fiji and worked as a labourer. He participated in the movements in Fiji which were being done against the oppression of indentured labourers. He came with the contact of Manilal Gandhi and C.F. Andrews who were also participating in these movements. Ramchandra used religion to organise the people. He started *Ram Leela* in Fiji which helped to organise Indians. He wrote an article in the newspaper named, *Bharat Mela* which was published from Calcutta.

This article was related with the inhuman conditions of labourers in Fiji. He came to India in 1917 after receiving a letter from BalGangadharTilak in which Tilak requested him to come to India and carry on the struggle for the indentured labourers in India. He started his work from Awadh (Mittal and Kumar, 1978. 37).

After coming to India, Ramchandra heard the problems of peasants and contacted with *taluqdars* and requested them to help him to solve the problems of the peasants. *Taluqdars* were not interested to solve the problems of the peasants, therefore, he urged the peasants to solve their own problems by themselves. Ramchandra wanted to turn these movements into a big mass movement that is why, he requested Gandhi and other nationalist leaders to support these movements in Awadh (ibid. p. 38-40). In June 1920, Baba Ramchandra requested Jawaharlal Nehru to come to villages and see the situation of the peasants. Nehru writes about the meeting with peasants in Allahabad in his Autobiography that the peasants told him about the exaction by the *talukdars*. The peasants were more active between January to march 1921, mainly in south and south east Awadh like Rae-Bareilly, Pratapgarh and Sultanpur, under the leadership of Baba Ramchandra. Houses and crops of many landlords were destroyed by the peasants. In this situation, many merchants were forced to sell the goods in cheap prices. When Baba Ramchandra was arrested, 60000 peasants gathered around the jail and when they were assured that Baba Ramchandra would be released next day, the peasants called off their strike. They were assured that Gandhiji would come to make Ramchandra free (Chandra, 2011. 174-178; Gould, 1984. 2086-2088).

#### **Jawaharlal Nehru and peasant movements in Awadh:**

Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the most important leaders of the national movement. He came with the contact of Gandhi in 1916 in Lucknow but he moved towards the problems of peasantry in Awadh 1920. He at first, met with the peasants of Pratapgarh in Allahabad in 1920. He was requested by the tenants to come to Pratapgarh and see the situation of the tenants. According to Dhanagare, this was not easy for Indian National Congress and Nehru to take decision whether to join the peasant movement against the *nazrana* and other illegal exactions. He says that it was a test of Gandhi's new style Congress (Dhanagare, 1983. 117). In Pratapgarh he saw the condition of the tenants. He went to many areas and attended several meetings with the tenants. He stayed in these villages for three days. He got lots of affection from the villagers during his visit. He had a fear that the *taluqdars* would not be happy with his visit but he met with the tenants. When his father Motilal Nehru heard about his visit to the villages, he became happy. Jawaharlal's journey into the villages spread awareness among the tenants (Saran, 1989. 58-62). He was concerned more about the problems of the villages. He was also concerned with the problems of *dalits*. He supported Gandhian non-violent methods because he was of the view that this method was the most useful in contemporary India. He was arrested in December 1921. He argued before the judge that he was fighting for the freedom of his country. He did not want to hurt any nation. He found jails as the heaven (Kumar and Ranjan, 2011. 86). He was aware about the social gap between the Indian National Congress and the peasantry. He



writes in his Autobiography about these differences and argues that during his travel in India, he found that none of the villagers even knew about the term 'India' (Gould, 1984. 2084).

#### **Madan Mohan Malviya and peasant movements in Awadh:**

Madan Mohan Malviya was one of the founding members of Indian National Congress who had participated in its first meeting. Malviya is known as a social reformer. He did many work for the reform in Hindu society. He came in the contact with Gandhi during non-cooperation movement. He participated in Home Rule League. He also participated in many *Hartals* which were organised during non-cooperation movement. During non-cooperation movement, many leaders like Motilal Nehru, C.R. Dash, MaulanaAbulkalam Azad etc. were sent to jail. In this situation Malviya supported this movement and the students of Kashi Hindu University boycotted their examinations in support of non-cooperation movement (Sharma, 2004. 1-95). When KisanSabha was formed at Allahabad in 1917, Madan Mohan Malviya became the main leader of this KisanSabha. He drafted the rules of this association. Malviya published a newspaper, named *Abhyudhaya* which promoted the works of KisanSabha. Malviya had played an important role for the interest of the tenants. Also, he started a movement against high rent in Fatehpur district (Crawley, 1971. 96).

#### **Motilal Nehru and the peasant movements in Awadh:**

Motilal Nehru joined Indian National Congress in 1909. He participated in non-cooperation movement and participated in the peasant movements in Awadh along with the other leaders of Indian National Congress. He visited many areas of Awadh like Varanasi, Kanpur Allahabad etc. He also visited Bihar, Mumbai and Madras during the non-cooperation movement (Mishra, undated. 45). At the time of Eka movement, Motilal Nehru appealed to the peasants to cease their violent activities.

#### **Eka movement:**

Non-cooperation movement gave the required courage to the masses to offer resistance to the government. Kapil Kumar argues that the philosophy of non-cooperation had penetrated the villages. It deeply influenced the Eka(Eika) movement (Kumar, 1983. 22). The nature of peasant movement changed in Awadh after January 1921. Before this time Rae Bareilly, Faizabad, Sultanpur and Pratapgarh were the main centres of the movements, but after 1921, Hardoi, BehraichSitapurUnnao and Lucknow became the centres of the movement (Vero, 2014. 3-4). British government passed Awadh Rent Act in 1921 which gave some security to the tenants. This act was only for five years and it gave security only to the secure tenants. Due to this act, the movements in Awadh had become slow. But another movement was started in the central parts of Awadh like Lucknow, Behraich, Unnao and Khiri districts. This movement was headed by MadariPasi in Hardoi and Khwaja Ahmed in Malihabad. The main leader of peasants in Awadh, Baba Ramchandra was in jail at that time and the members of Eka movement decided to rescue him but soon Baba was shifted from Lucknow jail to Bareilly jail (Tandon, 1984. 80-81). The peasants of Eka movement were mainly from lower caste which is known as Pasi caste.

Jagdev Singh writes about the Pasi community in Awadh which had near about one lakh families in Awadh. He writes that Pasis used to be appointed as security guards in the villages. Most of them were looting and stealing on the ways near Kanpur and other areas. Many *zamindars* supported them and participated in their looting. But later, they became problematic for the *zamindars* (Singh, 2004. 171). GyanPandey argues that a Pasi leader named MadariPasi, tried to get the help of the local *zamindars*. Many *zamindars* supported this movement (Pandey, 2010. 185)

#### **Eka peasant movement in various parts of Awadh:**

Eka movement started because of the same reasons which were responsible for the earlier movements in Awadh. In the initial phase, KisanSabha participated in this movement along with the Khilafatists in Malihabad. The members of both the Indian National Congress and Khilafat movement, made Eka associations. Soon this movement became very violent. Therefore, the members of both the Indian National Congress and Khilafat movement separated themselves from this movement. The peasants of these areas were not ready to pay taxes and rents (Pandey, 2010. 149). The peasant movements started with violent demonstrations in some parts of Awadh in the winter of 1921-1922. These violent demonstrations were happening against the government. These movements occurred at the same time when the Indian National Congress started Non-Cooperation Movement. The main organisations, which were leading these movements, were guided by the programme and the ideologies of the Indian National Congress (Kelkar, 1975. 1987).

Unnao is a district of Lucknow division which consists of four tehsils like Safipur, Hasanganj, Unnao and Purwa. This district is mainly a rural district where 2.4 per cent of the total population live in the urban areas. Agriculture gives employment to the large population of the district. The peasant movement started in this district in 1920-21 under the framework of non-cooperation movement which was launched by Indian National Congress before this, Unnao did not have any organised movement. After Gandhi's returned to India from South Africa, large number of peasants joined Indian National Congress. Joining of peasants in Indian National Congress, provided an overwhelming majority of working class people. The Indian National Congress was determined to make India free from the British government as well as to secure justice for the betterment of the peasants. The British government introduced a new rent act for Lucknow and Unnao in 1886 which was valid up to 1921. This act was for checking the power of the landlords. The practice of *Nazarana* was started. The agrarian situation became intolerable for the peasants and agrarian riots started in the several districts of Awadh. Unnao was one of them (Pandey, 1971. 60-67).

Eka movement started actively in Hardoi district. Two villagers were killed in Udaipur village on March 9, 1922. In Behraich district, one *thekedar* was beaten by the peasants. The same kind of violent demonstrations happened in Sitapur district (Tandon, 1984. 81). In Hardoi District, a police party was attacked by some people from the Pasi community. The police fired on the villagers in which two tenants were killed (Pandey, 2010. 185). These violent

activities were happening in Awadh when most of the leaders of Indian National Congress were in jail (Crawley, 1971. 108-109). In this situation it was very difficult for leaders to support the Eka movement. On March 13, 1922, a meeting was held at Hardoi under the leadership of Motilal Nehru in which he appealed to the peasants to stop all violent activities otherwise, 'it would be impossible to obtain Swaraj; unity between peasants and zamindars would lead to Swaraj and assist the peasants more effectively' (Tandon, 1984. 81).

#### Methods used in Eka movement

The Eka movement was led by some Indian National Congress leaders in its initial phase but later it came in the hands of lower caste peasants who were less educated. They followed the ethical way. MadariPasi also used religious symbols like Baba Ramchandra used in earlier movements. MadariPasi invited the peasants to listen *Satyanarayan Katha*. These peasants were told to show unity against the zamindars and the government. They paid a small amount of money (2 paisa) and this money had to be used for the *Katha* or *Millat* (Tandon, 1984. 80-82). They took oath to give strength to their movement. They took many oaths: to refuse to leave their fields if wrongly ejected, to pay only the recorded rent, to pay rent regularly at the agreed times, to refuse to pay rent without being given receipts, to refuse to perform *Begari* for zamindars without payment, to refuse to pay *Hari* etc. There were some similarities in the oaths taken by the members of both the movements, Eka and the earlier movements, under the Kisan Sabha. They took oath that they would not do any kind of violence. Both Kisan Sabha and Eka movement's members emphasised that they would show unity and they would trust the *Panchayats* to solve their internal conflicts (Pandey, 2010. 173-175).

#### Indian National Congress and Eka movement

The All India Congress Committee (AICC) decided to start full civil disobedience movement along with not paying taxes in November 1921. Gandhi himself announced that he would start civil disobedience by organising non-payment of land revenue in northern districts of Awadh. The Kisan Sabha again started its work in northern Awadh with the name of Eka movement. The government tried to crush this movement. The members of the Kisan Sabha continued to work for the peasants. All India Congress Committee decided to start full civil disobedience in November 1921. They gave a new name to this movement - 'Eka; which means unity. But soon this movement went out of control of Indian National Congress. Gandhi was arrested in March 1922. After Gandhi's arrest the movement became slow (Reeves, 1966. 273 and Kelkar, 1975. 1992).

Ashok Shukla states that the Eka movement was started with the support from Indian National Congress. This movement was a Kisan Sabha movement which came to be known as Eka movement. This movement was a product of the oppression of the peasants. In its initial phase, Eka movement was non-violent till it was guided by Kisan Sabha leaders. After that it became violent. Many meetings were organised by the peasants of these areas and they joined the Indian National Congress by giving twenty-four paisa, and thus a big amount was collected. This money was used to meet the legal expenses of the cases which were against the

zamindars. These new Congress members took oath to be united against the exploitation of the zamindars, to not file cases against the peasants, and to follow the non-violent path. Many new Panchayats were made and new heads of Panchayats were appointed to solve the inner conflicts of the peasants. They stopped paying exorbitant taxes but they did not stop paying those taxes which were morally right. The success of this movement can be seen by the events in which twenty-one meetings were held within three days in a single police circle. In March 1922, two members of this movement were killed by the police when the police were investigating about the Eka meetings. Many members were injured. After this incident, the movements of the peasants became very strong (Shukla, 2014). Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohan Lal Saxena went to Sitapur district to enquire about police suppression and *taluqdar's* oppression. These two leaders gave the report to the U.P. Congress Committee (Tandon, 1984. 81). The pamphlets were distributed in support of Eka movement by the secretary of Hardoi Congress Committee in which the leaders like Mahajan Bahadur and Krishan Lal Nehru, urged Eka peasants to oppose the zamindars and the government (Mittal and Kumar, 1980. 37-38). Bandyopadhyay argues that the attacks by the peasants on the *Taluqdars* increased during the winter of 1921-22. The Indian National Congress found it difficult to control these attacks, therefore, it decided to leave the movement (Bandyopadhyay, 2009. 308). W. F. Crawley argues that:

*'it was not Gandhi's devotion to non-violence that forced him to stop the agitation...but the years 1920 and 1921 had shown, especially in Awadh, that the rural areas were capable of maintaining an organization independent of Congress initiative'* (Crawley, 1971. p. 96).

Crawley argues that Gandhi again started movement in Awadh and launched 'no-rent' campaign in May 1921. Eka movement was supported by Indian National Congress and they appealed to the peasants not to give rent in November 1921. But the colonial government wanted the end of the movement immediately. The leader of Indian National Congress were not in a position to continue the movement but the Eka movement was becoming very active. Nehru wrote in his autobiography:

*At that time our movement... was going to pieces. All organisation and discipline was disappearing; almost all our good men were in prison and the masses have so far received little training to carry on by themselves. Any unknown man who wanted to do so could take charge of a Congress Committee and as a matter of fact large numbers of undesirable men, including agents provocateurs, came to the front and even controlled some local Congress and Khilafat organisations. There was no way of checking them'* (Nehru quoted in Crawley, 1971. 108-109).

#### Indian political condition during 1920s and its effect on the Eka movement:

Eka movement happened from 1921 to 1922 in some parts of Awadh. This movement was a grass root level movement which was done by some lower caste peasants and these peasants were helped by some small land holders and zamindars who were not happy with the government. This



movement was crushed by the government by March 1922 (Vero, 2014. 4). Eka movement had started in northern Awadh, particularly in Hardoi, Sitapur and Behraich district. This movement can be seen as a continuation of earlier movements, which had happened in Awadh. This movement was similar to the movement led by the Kishan Sabha. The same kind of powers were involved in this movement also. The Congress also adopted the same kind of approach towards this movement, but soon Congress withdrew from this movement and the leaders of Congress claimed that this movement was not following the Gandhian principle of non-violence (Pandey, 2010. 149). As Pandey argues, Eka movement could not survive because Congress did not support it in the later phase. There were some other aspects of the then political situation which might have played a role in the decline of the movement. The attitude of government towards the peasant movements, after the end of non-cooperation movement, also affected the role of Indian National Congress in Awadh.

### Rise of extremist movement in Awadh

There were mainly two categories of the leadership of peasant movements in Awadh. The first category comprised the leaders who were working under Kisan Sabha such as, Madan Mohan Malviya, Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru etc. They were known as bourgeoisie peasant leaders. According to S.K. Mittal and Kapil Kumar, they had little interest in the problems of the peasants. The second category consisted of extremist peasant leaders such as Thakurdin, Brij Pal Shingh, Suraj Prasad and Madari Pasi. These leaders were active in anti-feudal movement, and believed in direct action against feudal practices. Ramchandra started extremist leadership in Awadh but he was not as radical as other leaders were. Ramchandra wanted that the urban leaders should participate in the rural issues. He met with Jawaharlal Nehru, and requested him to come into the villages (Mittal and Kumar, 1980. 30-37). The Eka movement turned violent in the later phase. This movement had religious symbols also. This movement became the cause of dispute between peasants and the landlords (Tandon, 1984. 80).

### Reaction of colonial government towards the non-cooperation movement:

Gandhi launched Non-cooperation Movement in 1920. Gandhi declared that this movement would be non-violent. But colonial government took the movement seriously. During November-December of 1920, the government arrested about 30,000 Indians. Most of them were Muslims because the Khilafat movement was also going on at the same time, and government had more fear of Khilafat movement. On 14<sup>th</sup> May 1921, Gandhi met with Lord Reading. This meeting took place because Lord Reading wanted assurance of non-violence from Gandhi (Riddick, 2006. 106). Mappilla revolt in Malabar was going on at the same time and Indian National Congress was participating in this movement. This revolt used violence. Colonial government crushed this movement forcefully (Hardgrave, Jr. 1977. 57-62). After Chauri-Chaura incident, Gandhi called off the Non-cooperation movement. Gandhi was arrested by the government on March 10<sup>th</sup> 1922, and was sent to the jail for 6 years (Riddick, 2006. 106). Jawaharlal

Nehru was also in Jail from December 1921 (Kumar and Ranjan, 2011. 86).

The colonial government became very careful after the First World War, and did not want any big revolt against itself. It was because, its economic condition was not very good after the First World War. If we see the colonial attitude towards India peasantry, we find that the government wanted to marginalise the peasants' revolts by giving some relaxation to the peasants because the government did not want any movement by the peasants at that time. Government had no problem to give possible relaxations to the Indian peasantry. We can take the example of Champaran and Kheda peasant movements in which the government tried to give some relaxations to the peasants and marginalise the movement (Mittal and Dutt, 1976. 33; Chandra, 2009. 282). Indian national movement had many phases such as Moderate phase, Extremist phase and Gandhian phase. Colonial government adopted different strategies in different phases. In Moderate phase, colonial government did not suppress the voice of the people forcefully. It was because the leaders of the moderate phase did not create any difficult situation before the government. But when the extremist phase started, the government tried to stop them forcefully. Many leaders were hanged by the government. Most of them were sent to jail for many years. In Gandhian phase colonial government adopted the middle path. They forcefully suppressed those movements which were based on violence, and those movements which followed non-violent path, the government compromised with them (Chandra, 2009. 240-293). Many movements happened in India which were based on violent methods therefore, those movements were crushed forcefully..

## 2. Conclusion

Awadh was a very important part of colonial government because of its importance in revenue income. The land of this region was very fertile therefore, the agriculture production was in very good condition. There was very good relation between tenants and the ruling class in Awadh before the colonial period, therefore we do not see any revolt against the ruling class in Awadh before the establishment of the colonial government. The *Nawabs* were directly in the contact of the common people. The colonial government brought some fundamental changes into the ruling class. They removed the *Nawab's* rule, and created a new ruling class which were *taluqdars* and the *zamindars*. They were responsible to the government. Government established the new ruling power because they wanted to get more money from the ruling classes. The role of these old ruling classes in the revolt of 1857 was also responsible for their removal. The new ruling class accepted proposals, and demanded higher tax than it was earlier. The rate of revenue demand was very high, therefore, landholders demanded more revenue from the tenants. This high revenue collection became the most important cause for the peasants' uprisings in Awadh. We do not see any active peasants' protests in Awadh before 1915. After this time Indian National Congress started taking interest in the peasants' issues in Awadh. The establishment of Kisan Sabha was an important event in this context. The meeting of Nehru and Gandhi in Lucknow in 1916 was an important event in peasant

movements of Awadh. Kisan Sabha was the local body of Indian National Congress in Awadh which led peasant movements in Awadh. Many Indian National Congress leaders like Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malviya, Gaurishankar Mishra and Baba Ramchandra etc. participated in these peasant movements. These peasant movements slowed down in 1921 because the government passed Awadh Rent Act 1921 which provided some relaxations to the peasants. But at the same time another movement started in some districts of Awadh which is known as Eka movement.

The Eka movement was led by some new local leaders such as Madari Pasi, and Khwaja Ahmed. This movement can be perceived as a continuation of the earlier movements but this movement was based on extremism. This movement continued for 3 to 4 months. By April 1922, this movement was stopped. The Indian National Congress participated in Eka movement in the beginning. They made plans for this movement. But Indian National Congress did not continue to support this movement because of some reasons. The first reason was the end of Non-Cooperation movement after Chauri-Chaura incident. All peasant movements were happening under this movement. Once this movement stopped, it affected all peasant movements. Gandhi was the main leader of Indian National Congress who was arrested by the government, and was sent for the six of year imprisonment. Along with Gandhi, most of the leaders of the Indian National Congress were sent to jail. Jawaharlal Nehru himself accepts that there was no experienced leader outside jail who could lead the movements. The second reason was that, as many scholars have argued, this movement started actively in some districts of Awadh. The tenants were in attacking mood in the beginning. Many attack incidents were reported on the landlords and the police also. The Indian National Congress did not want to follow violent path. The third reason was the emergence of new kind of peasants' leaderships in various parts of Awadh in 1920-1921. The Indian National Congress found it difficult to sustain non-violent movements in Awadh, because, these new leaders were not ready to follow non-violent path. For them, success was important. They were ready to follow violent path also. And, the fourth reason was the colonial attitude towards these movements. Colonial government did not want any protest against itself because their economy suffered a lot in the First World War. They were ready to give some relaxations to the peasants to marginalize the movements. But they crushed violent movements, very powerfully. The political situation of 1922 played an important role in the change of the attitude of Indian National Congress towards Eka Movement.

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