

Q "The peasant movements of the second half of the 19th century lacked a positive conception which would unite the people in a common struggle on a wide regional & all India plane & help develop long-term political developments" Critically evaluate.

Colonial economic policies & new land revenue systems transformed the agrarian structure & impoverished the peasantry when peasants could not take it any longer they resisted. Various peasant uprisings took place after the revolt of 1857, such as the Indigo revolt, Pabna uprising, the Deccan Riots, Ramosi peasant uprising etc. The common features of all these uprisings were -

- i) Peasants showed solidarity that cut across religious & caste lines.
- ii) Peasants co-opted & crushed the landlords, chiefs & princes & directly fought for their demands.
- iii) Peasants developed a strong awareness of his legal rights & asserted them.
- iv) Peasants used the judicial & administrative machinery for redressal of their grievances.
- v) Peasants were often supported by the modern nationalist intelligentsia.
- vi) Often the British government brought out legislations &

notifications to address the demands of peasants, such as the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act of 1879.

But there were certain shortcomings in these peasant movements -

- i) Their demands were almost wholly economic & they fought just against their immediate enemies like the foreign planters, zamindars & moneylenders.
- ii) They did not make colonialism their target. They had very limited objectives.
- iii) Their territorial reach was also limited.
- iv) They also lacked continuity of struggle or long-term organisation.
- v) These movements did not have any new social, economic & political programme.

Thus, these movements lacked an understanding of colonialism. They lacked a positive conception of an alternate society, a conception which would unite the people in a common struggle on pan-India plane & help develop long term political movements. Most^{of} these weaknesses were overcome in the 20th century when peasant discontent merged with anti-imperialist discontent & thus strengthened the national movement.