

Historic Relevance of “Pagdi Sambhal” Protest

In 2020, more than a century after the historic Pagdi Sambhal Jatta farmer's movement spearheaded by Ajit Singh in 1907 (Ajit Singh was the uncle of Shaheed Bhagat Singh) before Partition, the Central government enacted three 'anti-farmer' laws. The peasant organizations have resurrected it as an icon and a powerful inspiration to the present farmer's agitation on Delhi's borders and all over India.

The British colonial government brought in three anti- farmer laws in Punjab in 1906. They are: the Punjab Land Colonization Bill, which introduced inheritance by primogeniture, that take away the farmer's land, as they are fearing now; the Bari Doab Canal Act, by which rates of irrigation water increased, and 25 per cent hike in revenue rates was effected; and the Punjab Land Alienation Act.

Between March and May 1907, several meetings were held in various cities of Punjab to oppose the three laws. On March 22, 1907, during a meeting held at Lyallpur, Lala Banke Dayal, editor, Jhang Syal, recited his Pagdi Sambhal Jatta, now regarded as a classic. Sub-sequently, the peasantry's agitation was called as the Pagdi Sambhal Jatta movement. Lord Morley, Secretary of State for India, told British Parliament that in all, meetings held in Punjab, of which Ajit Singh had addressed 19 as the main speaker. Ajit Singh was a powerful orator who used to hold the audience spellbound. The British Officials described one of his speeches, delivered on April 21 in Rawalpindi, as 'highly seditious' and a case under Section 124 A (sec of the IPC was registered against him. Lord Kitchener, Commander-in-chief of the British forces in India, apprehended a revolt in the armed forces. Ultimately, the three laws were revoked in May 1907, but Lala Lajpat also a speaker at some of these meetings, was arrested on May 9 and Ajit Singh on June 2. Both were detained in the Mandalay prison in Burma for six months under Regulation-III of 1818. Both were released on November, 11th.

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