

Eka Movement, Objectives, Causes, History, Unity Movement 1921

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The Eka Movement, also known as the Unity Movement, began in the **Bahraich district** of Uttar Pradesh at the end of 1921. It was a vital peasant uprising during India's freedom struggle. This movement was primarily aimed at addressing the grievances of the peasantry against the exploitative practices of landlords and the colonial administration.

The word "Eka" means "**unity**" in Hindi, symbolising the collective strength and solidarity of the peasants against their oppressors. The movement was part of a more significant wave of agrarian unrest across India during the early 20th century, fueled by widespread discontent among peasants over issues like excessive land revenue demands, oppressive tenancy laws, and landlord exploitation.

Eka Movement Background

The Eka Movement (Unity Movement) shall be understood within the broader context of agrarian unrest in India during the early 20th century. This period saw a series of peasant movements across different regions, driven by the widespread exploitation of peasants under the colonial land tenure systems.

- Under British rule, India's agrarian structure favoured landlords like *zamindars* and *talukdars*, leaving peasants with minimal rights. Revenue policies such as the **Permanent Settlement** of 1793 and the Mahalwari system empowered landlords, exacerbating peasant exploitation.
- By the early 20th century, peasants faced high rents, illegal levies, forced labour, and evictions, even during economic hardships like famines. This discontent led to resistance movements, including the Eka Movement.

Eka Movement Objectives

The primary objectives of the Unity Movement were centred around addressing the immediate grievances of the peasantry and challenging the exploitative practices of landlords. These objectives can be summarised as follows:

- **Reduction of Rents:** One key demand of the Eka Movement (Unity Movement) was the reduction of rents to more reasonable levels. The peasants sought to end landlords' excessive and arbitrary rent increases, which left them with little to no surplus for their sustenance.
- **Rejection of Additional Charges:** The Eka movement opposed the payment of extra charges such as **nazrana (tribute)** and the **practice of forced labour (begar)**.
- **Abolition of Illegal Levies:** The peasants also demanded the abolition of **illegal levies (abwabs) imposed by landlords**. These levies included charges for various services and privileges that were not legally sanctioned but were forcibly extracted by the landlords.
- **Fair Tenancy Rights:** The Eka movement aimed to secure fair tenancy rights for the peasants, including protection against arbitrary eviction and the recognition of their rights over the land they tilled.
- **Unity Among Peasants:** The Eka Movement sought to build unity among the peasants, transcending caste, religious, and regional divisions.

Eka Movement Causes

The Eka Movement arose from peasants' grievances over exploitative colonial land policies and harsh economic conditions. High land revenue demands, unfair tenancy practices, and ineffective reforms fueled their desperation and desire for justice.

- **High Land Revenue Demands:** Colonial land revenue policies caused major dissatisfaction among peasants. Assessments were unrealistic and didn't reflect their economic struggles, leading to **unpaid taxes, penalties, and land loss**. Landlords also charged high rents, sometimes exceeding 50% of the recorded rent.
- **Exploitative Tenancy Practices:** The relationship between landlords and tenants was highly unfair. Landlords often raised rents arbitrarily, imposed **illegal fees, and forced labour**. Peasants lacked legal protection, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and fostering anger.
- **Economic Hardship:** The early 20th century was tough for peasants due to crop failures, famines, and diseases. Combined with **heavy taxes and landlord exploitation**, these challenges created desperation among the peasantry.
- **Influence of the Non-Cooperation Movement:** The **Non-Cooperation Movement** inspired peasants to resist British and landlord authority through peaceful means, providing a chance to voice their grievances.

- **Ineffectiveness of the Oudh Rent (Amendment) Act 1921:** This act aimed to regulate rents and protect tenants but needed to be better enforced. Landlords frequently ignored it, leading to more frustration among peasants and contributing to the Eka Movement.

Oudh Rent (Amendment) Act 1921

The Oudh Rent (Amendment) Act of 1921 sought to address tenant grievances in the United Provinces, particularly in Oudh. It established life tenure for tenants, replacing the previous seven-year period that allowed arbitrary evictions, and mandated rent revisions every ten years through agreements or settlement officers. The Act also abolished nazrana (renewal fees).

- However, implementation faced challenges, as landlords often ignored the law, continuing illegal levies and evictions.
- The colonial administration's slow enforcement led to peasant frustration, fueling the Eka Movement, which pressured authorities to uphold the Act.

Eka Movement Course

The Eka movement was the movement of Pasi tribal peasants of Bahraich against the British. It was first started in Lucknow, and then it spread to Barabanki, Hardoi, Bahraich, and Sitapur. The course of the movement can be divided into several key phases:

- **Initial Phase:** The Eka Movement started in Hardoi, Sitapur, and Unnao, where peasants were organised under local leaders. They formed village committees (Eka Samitis) and took the **Eka pledge**, which helped the movement grow quickly, using tactics like:
 - Establishing Eka Samitis to represent peasant interests.
 - Refusing to pay rent to challenge landlords.
 - Boycotting landlords and British institutions.
 - Mobilizing through meetings, protests, and demonstrations.
- **Spread of the Movement:** By mid-1921, it expanded to districts like Kanpur, Etawah, and Farrukhabad, where peasants defied colonial authorities by refusing to pay increased rents. Despite arrests and punitive actions, determination remained strong.
- **Repression:** The British responded with force, deploying police and military to suppress the movement, arresting many peasants and using violence to enforce rent collection. Nevertheless, the movement continued to grow.
- **End of the Movement:** By early 1922, the movement declined due to repression, internal conflicts, and the withdrawal of Congress support. Although the British restored order, the issues raised by the movement remained unresolved.

Eka Movement Features

The Eka Movement was characterised by several distinct features that set it apart from other peasant movements in India. These included pledge-taking, widespread participation, religious vows, and a focus on agrarian issues.

- **Nature of the Movement:** Primarily nonviolent, utilizing noncooperation, boycotts, and mass mobilization, though it became violent later.
- **Leadership:** Initially supported by the Indian National Congress and Khilafat leaders, it was ultimately led by local peasant leader Madari Pasi.
- **Participation:** Included diverse rural groups—small peasants, tenants, and agricultural labourers—uniting Hindus and Muslims against landlords and colonial authorities.
- **Pledge Taking:** Participants collectively pledged (Eka) to signify unity and determination against unjust practices.
- **Religious Vows:** Peasants took vows near a symbolic Ganga River representation, committing to pay only recorded rent.
- **Focus on Agrarian Issues:** Centered on rent reduction, abolition of illegal levies, and protection of tenancy rights, rather than seeking to overthrow British rule.

Eka Movement Outcomes

The Eka Movement had notable outcomes, including partial success in achieving lower rents and a stronger sense of unity among peasants. Its impact extended beyond immediate goals, influencing future peasant movements and advocating for better enforcement of the Oudh Rent (Amendment) Act of 1921.

- **Partial Success:** The Eka Movement Achieved some goals, like rent reductions and removal of illegal fees, but left many grievances unresolved without complete agrarian reform.
- **Impact on Oudh Rent (Amendment) Act 1921:** The movement pressured the colonial government to enforce the act more effectively and address landlord violations.
- **Strengthening Peasant Solidarity:** It fostered unity among peasants, empowering them through collective resistance and the formation of Eka Samitis, setting the stage for future movements.
- **Influence on Future Movements:** The nonviolent strategies and committee formations from the Eka Movement inspired subsequent peasant movements and motivated new leaders to advocate for marginalized communities' rights.

Eka Movement UPSC PYQs

Question 1: Economically, one of the results of the British rule in India in the 19th century was the **(UPSC Prelims 2018)**

- (a) increase in the export of Indian handicrafts
- (b) growth in the number of Indian-owned factories
- (c) commercialisation of Indian agriculture
- (d) rapid increase in the urban population

Answer: (c)

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