

# KISAN AND KISAN SABHA

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ALL-INDIA KISAN SABHA

NINTH ANNUAL SESSION

MUZAFFAR AHMAD

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## Presidential Address

BY

MUZAFFAR AHMAD

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## FRIENDS, COMRADES, AND DELEGATES,

You have assembled here to-day at a distant corner of Bengal for the ninth annual conference of the All-India Kisan Sabha. You have responded cordially to the invitation which Bengal sent out. I am myself a Bengali. It had devolved on me, originally, to offer you on behalf of Bengal's peasantry our heartfelt welcome and to look after you during your stay with us. You are familiar with Bengal, the province that has been in the van in India's struggle for freedom. You have known of the services and sacrifices of the Bengali peasants who have fought many a round with the British Government to win successive Tenancy Acts, who have sent their sons to the far-off frontiers of Afghanistan to fight and die for India's emancipation. The Bengal that you have known can no longer be recognised. Famine and pestilence have damaged most disastrously the social life of Bengal and particularly of the peasantry. Every peasant family is to-day a picture of continuing agony, for there is neither food nor clothing available. It has, therefore, been a far from easy task to complete all preparations for the session of the All-India Kisan Sabha, when we have had about a meagre three months' time. You are all aware that this session was to have been held in Malabar, but the Advisers' government prevented it. For myself I had joined my puny strength to that of my comrades of Bengal to prepare for this session as best we could in the little time we have had. But suddenly, and at the last moment, you have decreed a change-over, you have elected me to preside over this session. I must bow to whatever is your command, but in all sincerity I must tell you that I cannot help my misgivings. I cannot quite reconcile myself to the proposition that a Bengali should preside over a session which is being held in Bengal.

## Birth of the Kisan Sabha

The birth of the All-India Kisan Sabha is for India an historic event. Ever since the inception of British rule, the peasants have got together in various provinces and fought for their demands. Sometimes they succeeded in pressing their claims ; at other times, they did not. But no attempt was made to link up these isolated instances and to achieve Kisan unity all over India. If, occasionally, an attempt was made, it ended in smoke. The birth of the All-India Kisan Sabha in 1936 is, therefore, a memorable event. The infant that saw the light of day at Lucknow in 1936 did not, fortunately, die in his cradle ; he is very much alive and kicking, a fact to which the enormous congregation before me is witness. It is true, of course, that a very great deal needs still to be done, but even the most ruthless enemy of the Kisans will have to recognise that Kisan unity on an all-India plan has been achieved through the All-India Kisan Sabha. Representatives of the Kisans from every province in India are present here to-day. For the last few days they have discussed various problems and have arrived at decisions which in a little while will be placed before you.

There were many who frowned at the birth of the Kisan Sabha ; many, indeed, have wished its death. But the Kisan Sabha has lived and will live on as the great class-organisation of the peasantry. For nine years the Kisans of the country have given of their life-blood to build the All-India Kisan Sabha. The Kisan Sabha is not a mere platform of agitation. It does not stand for occasional meetings where thousands rally and listen to a variety of speeches, hot and cold, and go back to their normal avocations. The Kisan Sabha is an organisation. It has branches, which continue to multiply all over our villages. Different provinces in India have different languages ; correspondingly, the Kisan Sabha wears different names in different places. In Bengal villages we call it the Krishak Samiti ; there are provinces where

it is called *Kisan Sangham* or by some other name. In reality, it is the same developing organisation, of which you can be a member by paying one anna in the year. The Kisan Sabha has its books and records, its proper register, its rules of organisation and procedure which have necessarily to be observed by the members. *The Sabha's All-India membership figure stood on January 15 at 8,29,686.* This, of course, is nothing to make a song about, when we remember the total peasant population of our country. But when one recalls that the Sabha is only nine years old, the importance of the figure can by no means be underestimated. Whatever one's point of view, the fact remains that from year to year the strength of the Kisan Sabha as the class organisation of peasantry continues to be on the increase.

### **Why the Kisan Sabha?**

There were many in the Congress, in 1937 and 1938, who used to ask us, censoriously, what purpose was served by a separate Kisan Sabha. The Congress, they would aver, was as good as the Kisan Sabha, and could very well conduct agitation on behalf of the Kisans and fight for their demands. There were some inside the Congress who have gone so far as to point their accusing finger at us and say that we were, under cover of organising the Kisan Sabha, virtually setting up a rival Congress. Later, of course, these accusations lost their force, and principal Congress leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru conceded that the peasantry needed their own separate organisation, that is, the Kisan Sabha.

In Bengal, many Muslim Leaguers have raised similar objections. They claim that when the League could very well fight for Kisan rights, a separate Kisan Sabha was simply superfluous and that the peasants should much rather become members of the League. My answer to these objections is very simple. As in industrial areas trade unions function as the class-organisation of the workers, so in the rural areas have emerged the class-organisation of toilers on the land, the Kisan Sabhas. Workers' unions in industrial

areas are united in the organisation of the All-India Trade Unions Congress, and in similar fashion the class-organisations of the peasantry in the village areas have coalesced into the All-India Kisan Sabha. This is a point which I have already dealt with.

The All-India Kisan Sabha has not grown organisationally as a rival of the Congress or of the League. It has not worked to deplete their strength ; on the contrary, in the process of growing as a broad-based mass organisation it has in fact added to their strength. This could not have happened if the Kisans did not require their separate organisation. The Kisan Sabha has been born in the struggle against exploitation by the Government, by landlords and by money-lenders. The "Permanent Settlement" or the system of landlordism has made India industrially backward, hindered the development of agriculture and subjected the majority of our people to poverty and parasitism. The worker and peasant alone have been able to fight against it, and the strength of the Kisan Sabha has grown in the course of that fight. The Kisan Sabha, besides, has taught the peasantry to grow more food and help to relieve the effects of the terrible famine that has devastated our land. This year the Kisans in Bengal and Andhra alone, led by their Sabha, have produced nearly an additional 22 lacs of maunds of rice. When famine stalked cruelly over our country, the Kisan Sabha had launched on a programme of digging canals, building embankments, collecting seed and increasing production to mitigate the calamitous scarcity of foodstuff. The Kisan Sabha has fought unflinchingly against slavery and repression, and to throw overboard the heavy load, that Kisans have to bear, of rents and taxes and debts. The Kisans have come together in their Sabha which carries on its struggle to achieve patriotic unity in the political sphere. Where the Kisans have a common interest, the Sabha has boldly come forward and taught the peasantry to gird their loins and fight for their rights and demands and get proper recognition of themselves as a force in the country. It has

been in and through this work that the Kisan Sabha has proved to the hilt the need for its separate entity. The Kisan Sabha has not been conjured into existence by the wish-fulfilling theories of any particular party.

Peasants who are Congress-minded or League-minded or owe allegiance to no particular body can all come together in the Kisan Sabha and augment the unity and strength of their class. The unity and strength of the Kisans by no means militates against the strength of the Congress or of the League; it will, on the contrary, strengthen both and further their struggle for national demands.

Many Congress and League patriots have realised the truth of this proposition, and have helped the Kisan Sabha. They have stood alongside the Sabha and given it their co-operation in order to hasten the achievements of the peasantry's objectives. In doing so, they have not damaged by an iota the interest of the organisational discipline of the Congress or of the League, but have rather made the Congress and the League ever more popular among the peasantry. They are the patriots who are helping to make of the Kisan Sabha a mighty instrument to bridge the gulf between the Congress and the League. They deserve well, not only of the Kisans but of all honest patriots.

Among Congressmen, however, there have emerged a certain number who aim at setting up a rival Kisan Sabha, who refuse to come inside the Sabha and wish to lure the peasants away to a separate organisation. This disruptive effort will have the effect of weakening the Kisan Sabha and of breaking up the unity and strength of the Kisan movement. Those who wish to-day to form a rival organisation and refuse to come inside and work in co-operation with the All-India Kisan Sabha, allege that the Sabha is dominated by communists who, they add, push their party



policy through the Sabha's mechanism. Let it not be forgotten that communists have indeed built up the Kisan Sabha, they work tirelessly to raise the peasant movement to ever higher levels, and as a result they have won the affection and confidence of the Kisans. It is no wonder, then, that communists form the majority in the leadership of the Kisan Sabha. But can any one point out a single instance—imaginary accusations apart—where communists have attempted to lead the Kisans in a direction which profits only the communist party's interest? The Kisan Sabha has called on the Kisans to grow more food, to attack and eliminate the black market, to fight for Congress-League unity and win National Government, to agitate for the release of political prisoners, to stand firmly together against the fascist bandits in the event of Japanese attack. Where in all these slogans is a single item to which an honest patriot can object as derogatory to the national interest? Communists wish for nothing else than to make the Kisan Sabha a broad-based mass organisation of the peasantry; they have never wanted nor attempted to exploit the Kisan Sabha platform for advancing policies that had not been unanimously accepted and catered merely to their own party interest.

The struggle that the Kisan Sabha has to carry on in furtherance of the Kisan's interest can be waged through neither the Congress nor the League. The Muslim League is the political platform of *all* Muslims irrespective of classes and interests. And so also is the Congress the platform of all classes and interests. There is no bar to the enrolment in the Congress and the League for the Kisan's exploiters as well as the Kisans themselves. It is therefore obvious that not all the struggle of the Kisans in defence of their rights and interests could be waged through the Congress or the League. Not all the interests of the Kisans as a class coincide with the interests of each and every member of the Congress and the League. And hence the necessity for a separate class organisation of the Kisans, that is, of the Kisan Sabha itself.

## **Kisan Sabha is Opposed Neither to the Congress nor the League**

The Kisan Sabha is opposed neither to the Congress nor the League. The members of the Kisan Sabha can of course enroll themselves in both the Congress and the League. Actually the Kisan Sabha encourages them to do so. There are certain demands which are common to the Kisans as also to all the classes inside the Congress and the League. For such demands the Kisans shall fight in unity with the other classes inside the Congress and the League. Take for instance, the case of India's struggle for freedom. The Kisans stand for the country's freedom as much as any other class. The rights that the Kisans will secure on the morrow of the achievement of independence, only on the strength of those rights the Kisans will be able to free themselves from the oppressions that they have to suffer to-day, and thereby will be able to bring about a complete change in their condition of life. With the change in the Kisan's condition will be transformed the face of the entire society since the Kisans form a big section of the society. The Kisans will therefore not only fight for India's freedom, but fight it with their very blood. Therefore, too, they shall join hands with all the other fighters for the country's freedom. Hence the Kisans can and actually do join both the Congress and the League while remaining members of the Kisan Sabha.

I have here touched upon the question of our struggle for freedom. There are many other issues on which all must fight in unity, without prejudice and without reserve.

### **To the Communist Workers**

I am a member of the Communist Party of India. On the strength of that privilege, I would like to address a word or two to the Communist workers inside the Kisan Sabha. Never for a moment must you forget the difference between the Communist

Party and the Kisan Sabha. If you always bear it in mind then the chances of friction and misunderstanding between the Communists and the non-Communists inside the Kisan Sabha will themselves be eliminated. Whether it is the Kisan Sabha or the Trade Union, to keep up a mass organisation as a mass organisation is a very important task and responsibility for every Communist Party worker, because these mass organisations by themselves form the strongest foundations for the Communist Party. The door of the Kisan Sabha has to be kept wide open for every one no matter who he is, who accepts the programme of the Kisan Sabha and is prepared to work for it. Even if the Communists happen to be in the majority in a particular Kisan Samiti, that body has to be run as a Kisan Samiti and as nothing more nor less. Even where there are no non-Communists, the Communist workers must never make the mistake of identifying the Kisan Sabha with the Communist Party. Such mistakes will be harmful both to the Communist Party and the Kisan Sabha.

To build countrywide Kisan unity we shall have to strive hard to bring every Kisan inside the Kisan Sabha. Not a single Kisan—not even one without any political consciousness—should find it difficult to adjust himself inside a Kisan Samiti. We have to always bear in mind that any Kisan can join the Kisan Sabha, but only those Kisans with political awakening and accepting Communism can come and join the Communist Party.

### **Our Misery Drags on From Year to Year**

Year in year out we are passing through misery and sufferings. First came the ruthless repression and imprisonment of Communist and Kisan Sabha workers since 1940. Then in 1942 the Congress leaders were imprisoned, and an unbridled reign of repression was let loose upon the country. In its wake came the famine in Bengal. Famine appeared in other parts of the country as well. In Bengal alone, thirty-five lakhs died and another sixty-five lakhs

were turned into destitution. The cup of misery was yet to be filled: last year came the epidemics invading all parts of Bengal. For all these the Kisans had to pay the heaviest toll, thousands and lakhs of them perished in the ordeal.

With the arrest of the Congress leaders, a feeling of bitter discontent spread all over the country. The irresponsible bureaucracy unleashed widespread and horrible repression in which the people in the countryside, particularly the Kisans, had to bear the main brunt. In Midnapore in Bengal, in many of the districts of Bihar, in Balia and other districts of the United Provinces and in many a village in the Central Provinces and Berar, police terrorism knew no bounds. For stray acts of sabotage by a handful of misguided patriots whole villages were forced to pay heavy collective fines.

Prices of all commodities soared to unbearable heights during 1942 and 1943. The rise in the price of rice towards the end of 1942 and throughout 1943 did not benefit the Kisan, because he had already sold his own stock. A new set of hoarders never seen before was born, the rice disappeared completely from the market and there came the devastating famine of 1943. Not only many died as a result, but millions lost their property and thrown out of land. The poor Kisan, artisan and agricultural labourer of Bengal paid the heaviest toll. Not only did they lose their land but their homes as well. What happened in Bengal's countryside could be compared only to the Great Famine of 1776. Of the Provinces where food is grown, Orissa, Rayalaseema in Andhra and also in Malabar the famine left its mark. In other Provinces as well, the poor Kisans were acutely hit by scarcity and soaring prices. Widespread food scarcity was felt in the districts of Bizapur and Kankan of Maharashtra and in the Kathiawar side of Gujerat. To a greater or lesser degree, the Kisans all over India were severely hit by the scarcity of cloth, salt, oil and

sugar. In the famine-devastated regions, the very Kisan did not only become pauperised but also lost his home, his land and even his implements of cultivation. The grower of food became himself a destitute, he had to go to the town in search of a morsel of food, only to die an ignoble death on the stoney pavements of the city. In Bengal the number of peasant families having occupancy rights in the land is 60 lakhs. The total population of these 60 lakh families constitute nearly half of Bengal's population. It is they who used to raise the major share of Bengal's foodcrops. No less than a quarter of these families have totally lost their lands and properties. It is estimated that 15 lakhs of poor peasants, and 15 lakhs of rural artisans (like weavers, fishermen and cobblers) together with 25 thousand poor school-teachers have been left without any shelter. Roughly the picture in the villages is this: the peasants with occupancy rights are completely ruined; the poor peasant has lost his land and has become hired labourer on other's land. The lands have become concentrated in the hands of a few *mahajans*. The rural artisans, particularly the weavers, have fallen into the vicious grip of the merchants. The burden of debts and the agony of starvation have driven the agricultural labourer and the village artisan away from the pale of humanity. Famine did not end all their woes: on top of it came the epidemics. Drained of their vitality due to starvation, they fell easy victims of diseases. Cholera, kala-azar, malaria and scabies spared none. Such is the picture of the entire Bengal.

It was estimated that about the middle of 1944, at least three crores out of Bengal's six crores were down with malaria. If one lakh could die on the pavements of Calcutta, driven to destitution in 1943, malaria must have carried off another lakh during 1944. It is feared that out of the two to three crores attacked by epidemics, nearly twelve lakhs have become completely crippled and they could never be engaged in any productive activity.

In North Bihar too, epidemics marched in the wake of famine. No less than ten lakhs were attacked by malaria in 1944. In Kerala, also, malaria became rampant after the famine. Between June and October 1943, thirty thousand out of the 35 lakhs in British Malabar perished in malaria. Besides, another six thousand were carried off by small-pox in the early months of 1944. And throughout the year, malaria and scabies almost made permanent settlements, and even to this day they could not be dislodged. In other Provinces too, wherever the villagers have been devitalised owing to starvation and malnutrition, diseases hardly spared anybody, though in varying degree in different places.

So, in the last three years, whether it is bureaucratic repression, or famine or the epidemics—nothing has spared the poor Kisan, the land labourer, and the village artisan, who have been literally bled to death, and even when allowed to survive, were left with nothing but their bones.

### **Swami Sahajanand Saraswati**

At his ninth annual session of the All-India Kisan Sabha, we mark the absence from our midst of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. He belonged to the band of those who laid the foundations of the All-India Kisan Sabha, and he has throughout held positions of trust and honour in the Kisan Sabha. He was even its president last year. It is not indisposition that has held him back this year, it is a matter of profound regret that he himself walked out of the All-India Kisan Sabha, and for that he has to blame his own self, or to put it more clearly, his attitude of a Dictator. Kisan Sabha is a democratic body, all its offices from the top to the bottom are elective, and the Kisan Sabha refuses to be guided by dictatorial ukase of an individual leader.

Many of you, if not all, have read the Swamiji's statements on the subject. Many of you may have read the resolution passed

by the Central Kisan Council. The Swamiji has declared war against the entire Kisan Sabha. It is his belief that he can disband the entire Kisan Sabha. In no democratic organisation can the word of an individual be carried out in this way. Even if that individual happens to hold the highest office, he cannot claim to possess the power to disband the entire organisation. The constitution of All-India Kisan Sabha has not vested such powers to its President; if it had ever done so, the Kisan Sabha would not have been counted as a democratic organisation.

The Swamiji has tried to sow disruption inside the Kisan Sabha. The line that he has taken up is the line of destroying the Kisan Sabha. He had no authority to take disciplinary action against the All-India Kisan Sabha or any of its parts. The Central Kisan Council and the All-India Kisan Committee alone possess that authority. By doing what he has done he has lowered the dignity of his office. He has forgotten the very simple fact that in a democratic body, *the organisation comes before the individual*. Had he remembered this plain fact he could never have landed himself in his present plight. There is yet time for him to express regrets for his conduct and come back to the Kisan Sabha. My appeal to him is that he may do so even now.

### **The Task before the Kisan Sabha**

Wherever the famine has left its trails behind, particularly in Bengal, the social life has been shattered and gone to pieces. We could never before imagine that such a thing could ever happen. But let us not lose courage and helplessly feel that nothing could be done. It is for the Kisan Sabha to come forward to mend together what is broken up, to bring back the breath of life where death and disease prevail to-day. The Kisan Sabha has braved all kinds of ordeal, for it is a living organisation. The Kisan Sabha shall have to struggle with its very life, to rebuild what is shattered.

With the famine and the epidemics, land has gone out of Kisan's hands. The Kisan Sabha will have to struggle to get back those lands for the Kisan. Without land, the Kisan can never be rehabilitated. Wherever arable land is available, the landless labourer has to be provided with land. Whatever the law offers has to be secured for the Kisan. Whatever the law fails to provide, has to be fought for and won.

Then comes the case of the village artisans. The weaver has to be given back his loom: also, he has to be given yarn and all that he needs. The fisherman has to get back his net and his boat. Provision has to be made for other artisans as well so that they may be able to get back to work: whatever raw materials are needed for the purpose have to be secured. And for them alone, homes have to be rebuilt. To rehabilitate the village artisan is a charge for the Kisan Sabha, for without the rehabilitation of the artisan, the Kisan will not be rehabilitated.

The Kisan Sabha fights for the just prices of the Kisan's produce. The Kisan Sabha does not stand for prohibitive prices for crops. But at the same time the prices of the Kisan's daily necessities have to be reduced. Let the Government fix the maximum and the minimum rates for the crops. The minimum price that the Government will fix for jute should be the price at which jute is purchased from its actual grower.

The Kisan Sabha will have to fight its hardest against black market. The black marketeers are worse than vultures, for the vultures pick the flesh of dead corpses, while these human vultures take the flesh of living humanity. Unless and until this black market is smashed up, society cannot be rehabilitated. The Kisan Sabha will have to strive for the supply of goods at controlled rates to all, particularly to the Kisans. That could not be done without the strictest vigilance upon the black marketeers, without which their life intolerable.



Upon the Kisan Sabha falls the responsibility to feed the country. For that, Kisans will have to grow more, and ever more, food. Drainage of silted-up rivers and canals has to be undertaken. Fresh lands have to be reclaimed by digging canals or by putting up embankments, as the case may be. For the Kisan, there is the demand for land, seeds, cattle, manure and plenty of other things. The country cannot be saved with bare hands. To secure all that, we shall have to build up a powerful movement. And for that, the Kisan Sabha will have to join hands with all other parties.

The Kisan Sabha demands the immediate formation of a National Government trusted by the people. The Kisan Sabha demands the release of political prisoners. The Kisan Sabha demands unfettered civil liberties in the country. To realise all these demands, the unity between the Congress and the League has to be achieved. And for that, the Kisan Sabha will have to carry on ceaseless campaign.

### **Final Words**

The Kisan humanity forms the biggest section of the people of our country, being 80 per cent of the population. The country cannot survive unless the Kisan survives and prospers all by growing the food for all. If the Kisan perishes, the country cannot survive. Whatever way each one of us may earn, the bulk of what we earn comes from the Kisan. The Kisan has thus to survive, and not only survive but live like real men. For that is needed the Kisan's own organisation—the Kisan Sabha. It is only by working together in the Kisan Sabha, that the Kisans will be able to learn and understand everything. The Kisan Sabha is thus the very life of the Kisan. The Kisans themselves shall save the Kisan Sabha, with all their strength. The Kisan Sabha shall have to grow and become mightier than ever before. The Kisan Sabha shall struggle on and go forward in unity and comradeship with all.