

# **Tribal and Peasant Movement**

## **Tribal Movements in India**

The Tribal population is conservative and is always interested in retaining the features of their society. Tribal movements were inspired by revolutionary tendencies. They tend to fight and eliminate ill-tendencies that attempt to change the structure of the tribal society.

## **Causes of Movements**

1. Extension of settled agriculture led to influx of non-tribals in the tribal areas. These outsiders exploited them and extension of settled agriculture led to the loss of land by the tribals which reduced them to agricultural labourers.
2. Increasing demand for raw materials and railways, leading to increasing control of government over forest land.
3. The establishment of the Forest department in 1864, Government Forest Act (1865) and Indian Forest Act in 1878 together established complete government monopoly over Indian forest land.
4. Work of Christian Missionaries were viewed as extension of colonialism and were often attacked by the rebels
5. Land revenue Settlement: Expansion of agriculture by the non-tribals to tribal area or over forest cover led to the erosion of tribal traditions of joint ownership and increased the socio-economic differentiation in the egalitarian structure of the tribal society.
6. Shifting Agriculture, a wide spread practice amongst the various tribal communities was banned from 1864 onwards on the reserved forest. Restrictions were imposed on the previously sanctioned timber and grazing facilities.
7. Some of the tribal uprising took place in reaction to the effect of the landlords to impose taxes on the customary use of timber and grazing facilities, police exaction, new excise regulations, exploitation by low country traders and money lenders.
8. The rebellions by the non-frontier tribals were usually reactions against outsiders (dikus), local landlords and rulers, the support provided to the later by the British administration and intervention by them in the life of the tribals.
9. Introduction of the notion of private property- Land could be bought, sold, mortgaged which led to loss of land by the tribals.

## **Nature of Tribal Movements**

The Colonial intrusion and the triumvirate of trader, money lender and revenue farmer in sum disrupted the tribal identity to a lesser or greater degree. In fact, ethnic ties were a basic feature of tribal rebellions. The rebels saw themselves not as a discreet class but as having a tribal identity. At this level the solidarity shown was of a very high order. Fellow tribals were never attacked unless they had collaborated with the enemy.

Three phases of the tribal movements

Tribal movements are divided into following three phases

## **The First Phase (1795-1860)**

It coincided with the rise, expansion and establishment of the British Empire. The leadership emerged from the upper crust of the tribal society led by the traditional section whose privileges had been undermined by colonization of India.

**Main Tribal Uprisings-** Santhal rebellion; Khond Uprisings; Early Munda Uprisings

**A. Santhal Rebellion**

**B. Khond Uprising**

**C. Early Munda Uprising**

**D. Bhils and Kolis Uprisings**

**The Second Phase (1860-1920): It includes Munda Uprising under Birsamunda; Koya Rebellion.**

**The Third Phase (1920-1947): It includes Tanabhat movement/Oraon Movement, Rampa rebellion, and Chenchu tribal movement.**

### **Peasant movements**

When the elites of the Indian society were busy in initiating and social reforms to change their society from within to answer the moralistic critiques of the West, the rural society was responding to the imposition of colonial rule in an entirely different way. In contrast to the urban intelligentsia, who were also the chief beneficiaries of colonial rule, the response of the traditional elite and the peasantry, who were losing out as a result of colonial impositions, were that of resistance and defiance, resulting in a series of unsuccessful attempts at restoring the old order? Not that peasant revolts were unknown in Mughal India; indeed, they became endemic in the first half of the eighteenth century as the rising revenue demands breached the Mughal compromise and affected the subsistence provision of the peasants, and the Mughal provincial bureaucracy became ever more oppressive and rigorous in collecting it. The tendency became even more pervasive as the colonial regime established itself, enhanced its power and introduced a series of revenue experiments, the sole purpose of which was to maximize its revenue income. Ruin of handicraft added to the situation. Thus it can be said that resistance to colonial rule was there as old as the rule itself. Some of the peasant rebellions in pre-1857 India were participated exclusively by the tribal population whose political autonomy and control over local resources were threatened by the establishment of British Rule and the advent of its non-tribal agents. But as the time line of peasant movement mainly stretches from 1857 to 1957.

Thus it is evident that the colonial rule even, during the days of the east India Company witnessed numerous uprising and disturbances. The nature of these disturbances varied from elitist grievances as manifested in the rebellions headed by deposed rulers to the popular grassroots or people's movement, as exemplified by various tribal movements. These varied grievances reached their climax in the revolt of 1857, which in spite of targeting certain groups of Indians remains the prominent uprising against the British before the beginning of the Indian Freedom movement.

## Civil Uprisings

The civil uprisings include uprisings by common people, zamindars, poligars, thekedars etc. It does not encompass anything related to military or defence. The deposed native rulers or their descendants, ex-retainers, officials etc led these uprisings at various parts of the country. Their basic objective was to restore earlier forms of rule and social relations. The major causes for such civil uprisings are:

- Colonial land revenue system: The system of Zamindari, Ryotwari and Mahalwari had led to disruption in the traditional social structure. Peasants were disabled due to high taxation, summary eviction from their lands, frequent rise in the taxes, lack of security of tenure etc.
- Exploitation: Growth of intermediary revenue collectors, money lenders, tenants etc. has led to severe economic exploitation of the peasants.
- Impoverishment of artisans: Promotion of British manufactured goods led to the devastation of Indian handloom and handicraft industries. There was a disappearance of traditional patrons of artisans which led to the further ruin of Indian industries.
- Deindustrialization: Migration of workers from industries to agriculture due to the destruction of traditional industries
- Foreign character: The British had remained alien to this land and treated natives with contempt.

## Sanyasi Revolt (1763-1800)

- **Cause:** The disastrous famine of 1770 and the harsh economic order of the British and the restrictions imposed on the pilgrims visiting the holy places.
- Sanyasis were joined by a large number of dispossessed small zamindars, disbanded soldiers and rural poor. They raided Company factories and the treasuries, and fought the Company's forces.
- **Curtailed by:** Warren Hastings
- Also referred to as the **Fakir Rebellion**.
- **Important leaders:** Majnum Shah, Chirag Ali, Musa Shah, BhawaniPathak and Debi Chaudhurani
- **Anandamath**, a semi-historical novel by **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay**, is based on the Sanyasi Revolt.

## Revolt of Moamarias (1769-99)

- It was a potent challenge to the authority of **Ahom kings of Assam**.
- The Moamarias were low-caste peasants who followed the teachings of **Aniruddhadeva** (1553-1624).
- To crush these revolts, the Ahom ruler had to request for British help. The revolt weakened kingdom and it fell to a Burmese invasion and finally came under British rule.

## Revolt of Raja of Vizianagaram (1794)

- In 1758, a treaty was made between the English and AnandaGajapatiraju, the ruler of Vizianagaram, to jointly oust the French from the Northern Circars. In this mission they were successful.

- English refused to honour the terms of the treaty. AnandRaju died before he could seriously tackle the English.
- The East India Company demanded a tribute of three lakh rupees from Vizayaramaraju and asked him to disband his troops. This angered the raja as there were no dues to be paid to the Company.
- The raja supported by his subjects rose up in revolt. The raja died in a **battle at Padmanabham**.

### **Kutch Rebellion 1819**

The people in Kutch rose against the British when in 1819, they deposed RaoBharmal and placed his infant son on the throne. The masses got violent and the British had to opt for conciliation.

### **Other Revolts of West India**

- **Waghera Revolt** : 1820
- **Ramosi Revolt** : 1825-26 under Chittur Singh around Satara Area of Maharashtra
- **SataraRevolt** : Under DharRao in 1840. This was a follow up of the Ramosi revolt because the ruler of SataraPratap Singh was deposed by the British.
- **Bundela Revolt**: In 1842 UnderMadhukar Shah. The revolt was subdued and Madhukar Shah was executed.
- **Gadkari Revolt**: It took place in Kolhapur area.
- **Naikada Revolt**: **Naikada Revolt took place under Roop Singh and JoriaBhagat.**

### **Revolt under VasudevBalwantPhadke**

A revolt was led by VasudevBalwantPhadke in 1877-78 in the Vashi&Panvel area of Maharashtra. Phadke is known as father of the armed struggle for India’s independence.

He created a group called *Ramoshi*, which was the group of Ramoshis, Kolis, Bhils and Dhangars communities in Maharashtra and the actually the “*organized political dacoits*“. He was captured and imprisoned in 1879 and died in 1883.

### **Uprisings in Karnataka**

The “Doctrine of lapse” gave rise to dissent and resistance from princely states across the country. Major centers prior to 1857 were under KitturChennamma, SangolliRayanna in 1830s. The centres of uprising were Supa, Bagalkot, Shorapur, Nargund and Dandeli. These rebellions – which coincided with the 1857 war of independence – were led by MundargiBhimarao, BhaskarRaoBhave, the HalagaliBedas, Raja VenkatappaNayaka and others.

### **Rebel by VeluThampiDalawa 1806**

Dalwa means Prime Minister. VeluThampiDalawa was the Prime Minister of the local Raja of Travancore between 1802 and 1809. He rose in rebellion against the proposed reduction in the allowances, under the subsidiary alliance treaty with the Travancore. He raised the army known as Nair Batallion. The Rebellion was quelled with a large army of the British.

## Tribal Movements

**Characteristics**

**19<sup>th</sup> Century Peasant Movements**

**20<sup>th</sup> Century Peasant Movements**

<b>Objective of Movements:</b>	The objective of these movements were <b>centered almost wholly on economic issues</b> rather than ending the exploitation of the peasants.	The peasants were brought into the <b>broader struggle against colonialism</b> beginning with Champaran, Kheda and later Bardoli movement.
<b>Leadership:</b>	The leadership of these revolts were from the <b>peasantry itself.</b>	The movements were led by Congress and communist leaders.
<b>Extent of Movements:</b>	Territorial reach was <b>limited to a particular local region.</b>	<b>All India movements.</b> The chief form of mobilisation was through holding kisan conferences and meetings.
<b>Understanding of Colonialism:</b>	Directed towards specific and limited objectives and redressal of particular grievances.  <b>Colonialism was not the target of these movements.</b>	There was an <b>emergence of anti-colonialism consciousness</b> among peasants.
<b>Formal Organization:</b>	<b>No formal organization.</b>  These caused movements to be a <b>short term phenomenon.</b>	Emergence of independent class organisations of kisans in rural India.  <b>The All India Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936.</b>

## **Khasi Uprising**

'Khasi' is a tribal community which lives in the region between Garo and Jaintia Hills. Khasi uprising of 1783 was in protest of East India Company's effort to build a road link between Brahmaputra Valley and Sylhet.

The leaders of this revolution were Tirath Singh and Ganga Singh. This uprising developed into a popular revolt during British rule. By 1833, the revolt was suppressed by English military action.