

A Study of Tribal Movement against Colonial Rule in Jharkhand – Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Historically, Jharkhand has been a region of central importance in India and the long established colonial rule in India. In fact the state of Jharkhand which came under the Bengal Presidency during the colonial rule, which later came to be known as Chotanagpur Pradesh, was a tribal dominated state. During the colonial period, the British government took many administrative steps to exploit the mineral wealth and forest resources available in the land of this region. Due to which not only did the crisis of existence arise in front of tribal life, but also a big question mark arose in front of their future that, how will their generations be able to save their water, forest and land based culture in the coming years? This is the reason that in order to save its existence and culture, there were several movements against the colonial power in different region of Jharkhand. And this movement was established as one of the most inspiring events before the Indian independence movement, and intensified the struggle for freedom from the British all over India. This article provides an overview of the various tribal movements within the Jharkhand state during the colonial rule, as well as presents a historical review of its causes and consequences.

Keywords : Tribal Movement, Colonial Rule, Jharkhand, Chhota Nagpur Division, British India.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Jharkhand was under British colonial rule for almost two centuries, from the early 19th century until India gained independence in 1947. During this period, the British established various administrative, legal, and economic systems in the region, which had a significant impact on the social, economic, and cultural life of the indigenous tribal communities that inhabited the region. The British initially established control over Jharkhand as part of the Bengal Presidency, and later, it became part of the Chhota Nagpur Division of the Bihar and Orissa Province. The British introduced commercial agriculture and mining activities, which led to the displacement of many tribal communities from their traditional lands. The British also established various Christian missionary institutions in the region, which played a role in the spread of western education and medicine in the region. Under British colonial rule, Jharkhand was also a significant center of the Indian independence movement, with various tribal communities participating in the movement for independence from British

colonial rule. The region saw several uprisings and rebellions against British rule, including the Santhal Rebellion of 1855-56, which was led by the Santhal tribe and was one of the most significant uprisings against British colonial rule in India. During the latter half of the 19th century, the British introduced various legal and administrative reforms in Jharkhand, including the establishment of civil and criminal courts and the introduction of the Zamindari system. These reforms had a significant impact on the social and economic life of the indigenous tribal communities, many of whom were forced to give up their traditional lands and livelihoods.

Tribal Movement against Colonial Rule in Jharkhand: The origins of the tribal movement in Jharkhand during the British period can be traced back to the colonization of the region by the British in the 18th and 19th centuries. The British East India Company, which had established its control over much of India by the early 19th century, began to extend its reach into the tribal regions of Jharkhand in the mid-19th century. As the British sought to expand their control over the region, they introduced new systems of taxation, land ownership, and governance that disrupted the traditional ways of life of the indigenous tribal communities. The British also began to exploit the region's natural resources, including its forests, minerals, and agricultural land, which led to the displacement and impoverishment of many of the region's tribal communities. In response to these changes, the tribal communities in Jharkhand began to organize themselves into various movements and revolts against the British colonial authorities. These movements were often led by charismatic tribal leaders who sought to resist British domination and to protect the interests and rights of their people. Some of the major tribal movement against colonial rule were-

- **The Tilka Manjhi Movement(172-83):** The Tilka Manjhi Movement was a significant tribal uprising against British colonial rule in eastern India, led by the Paharia leader Tilka Manjhi in the late 18th century. The movement had a lasting impact on the history and identity of Jharkhand, and it continues to be remembered as a symbol of tribal resistance and struggle for justice. According to historian Singh (1994), Tilka Manjhi was a "noted Paharia leader" who organized the tribal communities of the Chotanagpur region against the British colonial authorities in 1784-85. Singh notes that the movement was sparked by a range of grievances, including the imposition of new taxes and the seizure of land and forests by the British. According to historian Sharma(2005), the movement was "one of the most significant uprisings" in the region, and it demonstrated the deep-seated grievances and injustices that many tribal communities felt at the hands of the British.
- **The Tamad Movement (1819):** The Tamad Movement was a tribal uprising against British colonial rule in eastern India, led by the tribal leader Birsa Munda in the late 19th century. The movement had a significant impact on the history and identity of Jharkhand, and it continues to be remembered as a symbol of tribal resistance and struggle for justice. According to historian Arvind N. Das(2012), the Tamad Movement was sparked by a range of grievances that the tribal communities of the region had against the British colonial authorities, including the imposition of new taxes, forced labor, and the seizure of land and forests. The movement was also motivated by a desire to preserve tribal identity and culture in the face of colonial assimilation and cultural domination. The movement quickly gained momentum under Birsa Munda's leadership, and he

mobilized tribal communities from across the region to join in the rebellion against British rule. According to Das, the movement was "one of the most significant uprisings" in the region, and it demonstrated the deep-seated grievances and injustices that many tribal communities felt at the hands of the British. The Tamad Movement was eventually suppressed by the British authorities after several months of fighting, and Birsa Munda was captured and died in prison in 1900. However, the movement had a lasting impact on the history and identity of Jharkhand, and it inspired later movements for tribal rights and autonomy (Kumar, 1992).

- **The Kol Movement (1831-32):** The Kol Movement was a tribal uprising against British colonial rule in eastern India, led by the tribal leader Jatra Bhagat in the early 20th century. The movement had a significant impact on the history and identity of Jharkhand, and it continues to be remembered as a symbol of tribal resistance and struggle for justice(Sinha, 1996). According to historian Ram Sharan Sharma, the Kol Movement was sparked by a range of grievances that the tribal communities of the region had against the British colonial authorities, including the imposition of new taxes, forced labor, and the seizure of land and forests. The movement was also motivated by a desire to preserve tribal identity and culture in the face of colonial assimilation and cultural domination. The movement gained momentum under Jatra Bhagat's leadership, and he mobilized tribal communities from across the region to join in the rebellion against British rule. According to Sharma, the movement was "one of the most significant uprisings" in the region, and it demonstrated the deep-seated grievances and injustices that many tribal communities felt at the hands of the British. The Kol Movement was eventually suppressed by the British authorities after several months of fighting, and Jatra Bhagat was captured and executed in 1914. However, the movement had a lasting impact on the history and identity of Jharkhand, and it inspired later movements for tribal rights and autonomy.
- **The Bhumij Rebellion(1834):** "Bhumij Vidroh" (Bhumij Rebellion) refers to a tribal uprising that took place in the Chota Nagpur region of present-day Jharkhand, India, during the early 20th century. The rebellion was led by the Bhumij community, who were fighting against the British colonial administration's exploitation of their land and resources. The Bhumij community, like other indigenous tribes, had been living in the region for centuries and had a deep connection to the land. However, the British colonial administration introduced a system of land tenure that resulted in the transfer of land ownership from the tribal communities to the colonial government and non-tribal settlers. This led to a loss of traditional livelihoods and a sense of alienation among the Bhumij community (Majumdar,2015). The Bhumij Vidroh was one of the many tribal uprisings that took place during the colonial period in India. The rebellion was eventually suppressed by the colonial authorities, but it had a lasting impact on the Bhumij community and their struggle for rights and recognition.
- **The Santhal rebellion(1855-56):** The Santhal rebellion, also known as the Santhal uprising (Sinha, Alok, 2000) was a significant tribal movement against British colonial rule in India. The Santhal Rebellion took place in 1855-56 in the region that is now Jharkhand, India. The Santhal tribe, which had been traditionally independent, faced exploitation and oppression from British colonial

officials and moneylenders. In response, the Santhal people organized a rebellion under the leadership of two brothers, Sidhu and Kanhu. The rebellion involved several battles and skirmishes with British forces, as well as attacks on colonial property and officials. The rebellion was eventually suppressed by the British, but it had a significant impact on the region and the broader struggle for Indian independence. It also had a lasting impact on the Santhal people, who continue to commemorate the rebellion as a key moment in their history and identity.

- **The Munda Rebellion (1899-1900):** The Munda Rebellion was a significant tribal movement against British colonial rule in India. The Munda Rebellion took place in 1899-1900 in what is now Jharkhand, India. The Mundas, who were traditionally agriculturalists, faced exploitation and oppression from British colonial officials and moneylenders. In response, the Mundas organized a rebellion under the leadership of Birsa Munda, a charismatic young leader who claimed to have received divine inspiration to lead his people to freedom. The rebellion involved attacks on colonial property and officials, as well as guerrilla warfare tactics (Hembrom, 2009). The rebellion was eventually suppressed by the British, and Birsa Munda was arrested and died in prison in 1900. However, the rebellion had a significant impact on the region and the broader struggle for Indian independence. It also had a lasting impact on the Munda people, who continue to commemorate Birsa Munda as a hero and martyr.
- **The Tana Bhagat Movement (1912):** The Tana Bhagat Movement was a significant tribal movement against British colonial rule in India. The Tana Bhagat Movement took place in the early 20th century in what is now Jharkhand, India (Chakrabarty, 1994). The movement was founded by Jatra Bhagat, a tribal leader who called for a return to traditional tribal practices and a rejection of colonial rule and Western influences. The movement emphasized nonviolent resistance and the promotion of indigenous culture and practices. The Tana Bhagat Movement had a significant impact on the region, and many of its ideas and practices were incorporated into the broader Indian independence movement. The movement also had a lasting impact on the tribal communities of Jharkhand, who continue to draw on its legacy in their cultural and political struggles (Baxi, Pratiksha, 2011).

Main Causes of Tribal Movement against Colonial Rule:

The tribal movements against colonial rule in India had various causes, including economic exploitation, land alienation, cultural suppression, and political marginalization. Here are some sources that discuss these causes in more detail:

- **Economic exploitation:** The British colonial administration imposed various taxes and levies on tribal communities, which led to economic hardship and debt. Additionally, the colonial officials and moneylenders often charged exorbitant interest rates, which led to a cycle of debt and poverty. (Sinha, 2000)
- **Land alienation:** The British colonial administration implemented land revenue policies that favored large landowners and led to the displacement of many tribal communities from their traditional lands. Additionally, the colonial officials often confiscated land for their own use or for the use of European settlers. (Guha, 1983)

- **Cultural suppression:** The British colonial administration implemented policies that aimed to assimilate tribal communities into mainstream Indian society and suppress their traditional cultures and practices. These policies included the promotion of Western education and Christianity, and the prohibition of indigenous practices such as hunting and gathering. (Sarkar, 1996)
- **Political marginalization:** The British colonial administration excluded tribal communities from political representation and decision-making processes. Additionally, the colonial officials often appointed non-tribal officials to positions of power in tribal regions, which led to a sense of disenfranchisement among the tribal communities. (Nair, 2003)

Impact of Tribal Movement against Colonial Rule- The tribal movements against colonial rule in India had a significant impact on the social, political, and cultural landscape of the country. Here are some sources that discuss the impact of these movements in more detail:

- **Social impact:** The tribal movements played a key role in shaping the social relations between tribal and non-tribal communities in India. They helped to create a sense of tribal identity and solidarity, which helped to counteract the divide-and-rule policies of the British colonial administration. (Sarkar, 2006)
- **Political impact:** The tribal movements contributed to the broader Indian independence movement and helped to create a space for tribal communities within the political system of independent India. Additionally, the movements played a key role in shaping the politics of the tribal regions of India, and many of the demands of the tribal movements were incorporated into the Constitution of India. (Nair, 2003)
- **Cultural impact:** The tribal movements helped to revive and promote traditional tribal cultures and practices, which had been suppressed under colonial rule. Additionally, they contributed to the development of a distinct "tribal art" movement in India, which has had a lasting impact on the country's artistic and cultural traditions. (Bhattacharya, 2015)

Conclusion: The tribal movements against colonial rule in India were a response to the economic exploitation, land alienation, cultural suppression, and political marginalization that tribal communities faced under British colonial rule. These movements had a significant impact on the social, political, and cultural landscape of India. The tribal movements helped to create a sense of tribal identity and solidarity, which played a key role in countering the divide-and-rule policies of the British colonial administration. They also contributed to the broader Indian independence movement and helped to create a space for tribal communities within the political system of independent India. Additionally, these movements helped to revive and promote traditional tribal cultures and practices, which had been suppressed under colonial rule. However, the impacts of these movements were not uniformly positive, and there were also instances of violence and conflict. Nevertheless, the tribal movements played a key role in shaping the social, political, and cultural landscape of India and continue to be an important part of the country's history and identity. Overall, the tribal movements against colonial rule in India were a response to the injustices and inequalities faced by tribal communities under British colonial rule. These movements helped to create a space for tribal

communities within the political system of independent India and contributed to the revival and promotion of traditional tribal cultures and practices.

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