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Beginning of Freedom Journey by Tribal Uprisings in Colonial India

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Abstract:

Many freedom fighters, revolutionaries, workers, labours, and women have sacrificed their lives to give India its independence. However, the indigenous and tribal communities who were marginalized and deprived by Hindu culture also fought against the British and played an essential role in achieving independence. During the pre-independence era, several uprisings were fought against the British by various tribes such as Koli, Bhil, Ramoshi, Gadkari, and Pendhari. etc. Unfortunately, in the course of time, the struggle for freedom by these tribal communities and marginalized groups and deprived masses has been forgotten.

According to the memoirs, the term 'tribal' means an original inhabitant of a particular place. Due to their separation from civic improvements, they have different residences, languages, and cultures. According to the 1971 census, there were 400 tribes and a population of 38 million in India. These indigenous and tribal communities are widely found in Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and some other parts of India. In Maharashtra they are concentrated in Thane, Raigad, Pune, Nashik, Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Jalgaon, Dhule, Amravati, Nanded, Yavatmal, Bhandara, Chandrapur, and Gadchiroli. The present research paper deals with the Tribal uprisings in colonial India.

Keywords: Indigenous, Tribal, Marginalize, Uprising, Census, Colonial India

Introduction:

The British East India Company was established in India in 1600 to carry out trade. After the Company's business interests came into conflict with the interests of Indian merchants, the British used their sophisticated military, trained troops, and naval blockades to establish their dominance. Finally, there was a struggle with Indian rulers. In 1757, the victory of Plassey and in 1764 of Buxar, gave the English control over Bengal, and later their Union Jack was flown throughout India. The English aimed to change the governance system of the initially conquered regions, as well as to receive maximum economic benefits. For their fulfilment, they had already completely altered the land revenue system. As a result, various indigenous tribes, communities, and farmers in India began to be exploited. Due to the lack of basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter, their struggle with the British began.

The British exploited the people's economy and gained significant economic

benefits for themselves and the company. During the time of Robert Clive, the Dual Government system was introduced. Landowners and farmers had to pay higher land revenue and taxes. As a result, the oppressed people began to struggle with the landowners and then with British officials. The following are few major tribal uprisings in colonial India which gave inspiration for freedom struggle.

Bhil uprising (1803-28):

The Bhil community is considered the largest in India in terms of population. The Bhil community has a significant presence in Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, the Bhil population is concentrated in Khanadesh, Rajputana, Malwa, Western Maharashtra, Satpuda, and the Sahyadri mountain range. Agriculture, hunting, livestock rearing, gathering forest produce, and looting were the means of subsistence for the Bhil community.

The Bhil community benefited from the political anarchy in North Maharashtra. They looted Khanadesh between 1803 and 1816, and this uprising was accompanied by many instances of plunder. The province was devastated before it was annexed by the British. The British had to deal with the problem of Bhil uprising before they could rule over the province. In 1816, the Pindaris joined the Bhil community in their looting activities, and the Bhil settlements were destroyed by the Arab and Maratha attackers. The British gained complete control over Khanadesh in 1818. The British rule generated a deep sense of hatred towards the Bhil community among the British nobility.

Captain Briggs was assigned the task of pacifying Khanadesh by the British East India Company in 1818. About 8,000 Bhils surrendered to the British in 1818 in the Satpuda range. The Bhil community's traditional way of life was severely affected by British rule. The British government introduced a new system of revenue collection, which the Bhil community found challenging to adapt to.

Ramoshi's Uprising:

Ramoshis were one of the tribes of the wild community in Maharashtra, with a population of 18,000. Due to the freedom movement of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the desire for independence was also burning in the hearts of the Ramoshis. They lived in the forests, engaged in farming, animal husbandry, managing forts, providing security to villages, and working as bandits. They were also given the authority to collect taxes from certain villages.

Under the leadership of Chitrasen Singh, the Ramoshis looted and destroyed the Satara district and forts. The infamous murderers i.e. Sattu Naik of Saasvad and Umaji Naik of Purandar were nominated in the 1823 Kotwal's murder case, which caused terror among the police and government officials.

Umaji Naik was the leader of the Ramoshis. He was born in 1791 in Bhivandi village near Purandar. His father, Dadaji, was a famous bandit who had committed 1,110 robberies, according to the historian Macintosh. Umaji had been involved in his father's banditry from a young age and was later involved in managing the Purandar

fort. He continued to work as a bandit, robbing people, and was arrested by the British in 1818 after robbing a village called "Wing." While in prison, Umaji learned to read and write.

Clash between Umaji and the British:

Umaji looted the treasures of the British company and attacked several places. He even looted Patwardhan Nimbalkar and his army. He looted in places like Jejuri, Saswad, Bhiwari, and Kikvi.

The British company prepared to capture Umaji by assembling 152 horsemen at various locations, but they could not capture him because Umaji had the support of the village people and the society's elites. The British East India Company issued a public notice to capture Umaji and his associates.

However, Umaji challenged the British directly, saying that the British should return the ancestral land and rights of the Ramoshi community. In 1827, Umaji captured and beheaded five British soldiers and sent their heads to the British authorities at Saswad. He also issued a statement against the British.

According to the statement, the people of the Thera villages gave their share of the revenue to Umaji. In the end, the British captured Umaji's wife and two sons and daughter and imprisoned them, which led to Umaji's surrender. However, Umaji made a plan to take shelter with the British. The British pardoned Umaji for all his crimes and even gave him a job for two years. From 1828 to 1830, Umaji worked to maintain peace in Pune and Satara. During this period, Umaji also led looting and pillaging activities.

The British-Umaji conflict - Umaji used guerrilla warfare against the British, and caused havoc in Pune, Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur, Ahmednagar, and Marathwada. The British issued a public notice offering a reward of Rs. 10,000 and 400 acres of land to anyone who could capture Umaji.

Umaji's close associates, Kalu and Nana, also participated in the rebellion. Nana eventually betrayed Umaji and handed him over to the British on December 15, 1831, in a village near Mulshi in Pune district. Finally, on February 3, 1834, the British hanged Umaji. However, the rebellion led by Ramoshis for independence, in a spirit of freedom, is written in golden letters in Indian history.

The Uprising of the Kolis (1828 – 1848):

During the Maratha period, the Kolis were given the task of managing the forts. However, when the British took over the forts, the entire Koli community became opposed to the English. The British took away the land of the people in the Koli community. At this time, Ramji Bhangadia united the Kolis and started an uprising against the British.

In 1828, conflicts began between the English and the Kolis on the western coast. Captain Alexander Macintosh was appointed by the Company to quell this uprising. He was successful in suppressing the uprising.

In the following nine years, the Kolis prepared for another uprising. In the next period, the three leaders, Bhau Khare, Chimnaji Jadav, and Nana Darbar, emerged as

leaders. The Kolis used weapons and in 1839, 150 Kolis surrounded the government treasury in Pune. At this time, 54 Kolis were captured by the British and punished.

The next five years saw the Kolis remain peaceful. They refused to follow government regulations. In 1844, under the leadership of Raghunath and Bapu Bangadia, the Kolis started an uprising in Purandar, Satara, Nashik, Ahmednagar, and Pune. During this time, Tukya and Manakya Naik and other Ramoshis helped the Kolis. The uprising spread from Thane to Gujarat. However, the British were eventually able to suppress the uprising.

The Kol uprising (1831):

In the Chota Nagpur province, the tribal of the Kol community were living under the leadership of the Munda community. The British government had suppressed the tribal peoples of the Munda community, and as a result, the Kol community also faced oppression. In 1831, the Kol uprising occurred due to the support given by Muslim and Anglo-Indian peoples who had come from outside and were given land by the Kol people. This led to the massacre of both Hindu and Muslim people. This uprising spread to the Ranchi, Singhbhum, Hazaribagh, and Palamau regions. However, the British suppressed this uprising by using their military force.

Tribal War of the Warlis:(1945-47)

Among the tribal people living in the jungles of Thane district, the Warli community is prominent. The tribal people were the owners of the land in that area. However, under British rule, people of Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, and Iranian origin from outside Thane district entered the area and exploited the illiterate and innocent tribal people, took control of their land, and exploited them. To cultivate the land, the tribal people's labor was necessary. Therefore, they used the slash and burn method of agriculture and destroyed the tribal people's land. Godavari Parulekar analysed the tribal people's struggle in her book.

The tribal people's resistance and strength to bear oppression in Umbargav, Dahanu, and Palghar talukas led to the uprising against the government and landowners (1945-1947). Godavari Parulekar led this tribal struggle. At that time, the British government used its oppressive policies like forced resettlement and district confinement against the tribal people's leadership. Finally, the landowners and exploiters were defeated. There was a significant change in the tribal people's food, clothing, education, and customs and traditions.

Concluding Remarks:

During the period from 1757 to 1857, the British East India Company established its empire by annexing various kingdoms in India, such as Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Sambalpur, Jhansi, Avadh, Mysore, Maratha and Sikh Princely states. After the revolt of 1857, the British Parliament abolished the rule of the East India Company and changed the role of the institution. There was no equality in education, law, and taxation system between the institution and other regional kingdoms during their reign. The British Parliament introduced equality in their laws to create peace and order in society.

However, due to these reforms, the rights of indigenous, tribal and nomadic people in India were neglected, leading to their struggle against the British. These nomadic communities took up arms and fought against the British. During the 1857 revolt, the number of such nomadic communities and criminal groups increased significantly. Keeping their potential threat in mind, T.V. Stephens, a member of the British Council at that time, passed the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 to regulate them. According to Stephens, castes and tribes in India were inherently criminal and needed to be closely monitored. This led to the creation of opposition and uprisings against the British throughout India.

In 1908, a law was passed for the protection of the properties of the criminal tribes. It included provisions for their education, employment, rehabilitation, and the provision of compulsory residential education for their children for four years. Until 1945, due to the efforts of some British and Indian officials, significant improvements were made in the living conditions, education, health, and nature of the criminal tribes.

On January 26, 1950, India became a democratic republic, and the Constitution was accepted. by the 14th Amendment, which provided equal protection to all. On April 11, 1960, India's Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, broke the symbolic ground of the Solapur Settlement by cutting a ribbon hanging from a 14-foot-high pole, stating that the tribal communities fought for the country's independence against the dark laws imposed by the British and that they were now free. The criminal tribes, therefore, became part of the country's developmental progress. However, the Indian government has yet to conduct a proper census and provide information on the struggles for independence of these tribal and indigenous communities.

This research paper is an attempt to shed light on the struggles for independence of these tribal and indigenous communities.

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