

SOS POLITICAL SCIENCE & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

M. A POLITICAL SCIENCE II SEM

INDIAN POLITICS II: SOCIAL & POLITICAL PROCESS (202)

UNIT- IV

TOPIC NAME-TRIBLES MOVEMENT

Introduction-

Numerous uprisings of tribals have taken place beginning with one in Bihar in 1772, followed by many revolts in Andhra Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland.

The important tribes involved in revolt in the nineteenth century were Mizos (1810), Kols (1795 and 1831), Mundas (1889), Daflas (1875), Khasi and Garo (1829), Kacharis (1839), Santhals (1853), Muria Gonds (1886), Nagas (1844 and 1879), Bhuiyas (1868) and Kondh

Some scholars like Desai (1979), Gough (1974) and Guha (1983) have treated tribal movements after independence as peasant movements, but K.S. Singh (1985) has criticised such approach because of the nature of tribals' social and political organisation, their relative social isolation from the mainstream, their leadership pattern and the modus operandi of their political mobilisation.

Tribals' community consciousness is strong. Tribal movements were not only agrarian but also forest-based. Some revolts were ethnic in nature as these were directed against zamindars, moneylenders and petty government officials who were not only their exploiters but aliens too.

When tribals were unable to pay their loan or the interest thereon, money-lenders and landlords usurped their lands. The tribals thus became tenants on their own land and sometimes even bonded labourers. The police and the revenue officers never helped them. On the contrary, they also used the tribals for personal and government work without any payment.

The courts were not only ignorant of the tribal agrarian system and customs but also were unaware of the plight of the tribals. All these factors of land alienation, usurpation, forced

labour, minimum wages, and land grabbing compelled many tribes like Munda, Santhals, Kol, Bhils, Warli, etc., in many regions like Assam, Orissa, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra to revolt.

The management of forests also led some tribes to revolt, as forests in some regions are the main sources of their livelihood. The British government had introduced certain legislations permitting merchants and contractors to cut the forests. These rules not only deprived the tribals of several forest products but also made them victims of harassment by the forest officials. This led tribes in Andhra Pradesh and some other areas to launch movements.

Raghavaiah in his analysis in 1971 of tribal revolts from 1778 to 1970 listed 70 revolts and gave their chronology. The Anthropological Survey of India in their survey in 1976 of tribal movements identified 36 on-going tribal movements in India.

It was said that though these revolts were neither numerous nor gravely frequent, yet there was scarcely any major tribe in middle or eastern India which at some time in the last 150 years had not resorted to launching movements to register their protest and despair.

Some studies on tribal movements have been conducted and reported in North-East and Central India. However, there were an insignificant number of movements or none at all among the tribals of the southern states. This is so because the tribes down south are too primitive, too small in numbers, and too isolated in their habitat to organise movements, in spite of their exploitation and the resultant discontent. L.K. Mahapatra also has observed that we do not find any significant social, religious, status-mobility, or political movement among the numerically small and migratory tribes.

Tribal Movements after Independence:

Unfortunately, even after fifty years of independence, tribals have benefited least from the advent-of freedom. Although independence has brought widespread gains for the vast majority of the Indian population, Dalits and Adivasis have often been left out and new problems have arisen for the tribal population. With the tripling of the population since 1947 pressures on land resources, especially demands on forests — have played havoc on the lives of the tribals.

The basic issues behind the tribal movements in India after independence are and forest alienation training and job deprivation due to influx of the outsiders, cultural sub-mergence, and unbalanced development.

After independence, tribal movements may be classified into three groups (i) movement due to exploitation of outsiders (ii) movements due to Economic deprivation (like those of Gonds in Madhya Pradesh and the Mahars in Andhra Pradesh (iii) movements due to separatist tendencies (like those of the Nagas and Mizos).

The tribals movements may be classified on the basis of their orientation into four types: (i) forest-based movements, (ii) socio-religious movements or social-culture movements (iii) movements seeking political autonomy and formations of States (Nagas, Mizos, Jharkhand) and (iv) agrarian movement, Naxalban movement-1967 and Birsa movement 1968-69. Reformatory movement was found among the Mundas under powerful leadership of Dharli Aba, who preached Hindu ideals of ritual purity, asceticism and criticised the worship of priests.

The Naga revolution began in 1948 and continued upto 1972 when the new elected Government came to power and the Nag insurgency was controlled. The Mizo Government came into formation of Meghalaya State in April 1970.

The Naxalite movement of the tribals in Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh; the agrarian and movements of the Gonds and Bhils in Madhya Pradesh and the forest-based movements of Gonds were mainly launched for liberation from oppression and discrimination, backwardness and a Government which was callous to the tribal plight marked by poverty, hunger, unemployment and exploitation.

Jharkhand movement was started which demanded for the creation of new state due forest alienation, job deprivation, and influx of outsiders etc. The Jharkhand Party founded an Oxford educated Christian of the Munda tribe had demanded carving out of a new State, spreading from Palaman in Bihar to Keonjhar in Orissa and from Surguja in Madhya Pradesh to Manipur in West Bengal, of the Indian Union of which tribal people would be numerically dominant.

Ever since the entry of multinational companies for bauxite mining and processing in 1993, the tribal people of Kashipur and Laxmipur blocks of Rayagada district Damantpur block of Koraput district and Thuamul Rampur of Kalahand, district of Orissa have been apprehensive of displacement and loss of livelihood.

Concerned over prospect of having to leave their hearth and home, people started organising themselves. Road blockades, demonstrations were organised in front of Government offices at Kashipar and Rayagada. Survey areas of the companies were denied access to the area. The responses of tribal people were co-ordinated by organisations such as the Prakrutik Sampada Surakya Parishad, the Baphilimali Surakya Samiti and Anchahk Surakhya Samiti. Every village now has a resistance body.

Conflict over the mining of bauxite has taken a violent turn with killing of three innocent tribal people. Since 1993, the police have registered 80 criminal cases against the tribal people and activists. On several occasions, the police resorted to lathi charge. Activists were attacked and offices of the resistance movement were destroyed.

The resistances to the alumina project and the police firing have important implications. Successive Governments, various political parties that have been in power, local elites and local businessmen supported the alumina project. At the same time, the struggle of the people and their determination to make any sacrifice in order to protect their civil and political rights, right to livelihood and habitat clearly demonstrate that people at the grassroots are not going to tolerate the onslaught of market force.

Another movement has been started in Keonjhar district of Orissa against mining in the 90s for the displaced people, particularly tribals. In Keonjhar, the mining activities have led to heavy influx of workers from many parts of the country. The 90s decade saw an increase in migration due to geographical and socio-economic reasons, leading to a threat of cultural invasion. Violence of all type increased. Mining has led to indiscriminate deforestation and displacement of inhabitants.

The movement against mining is popular among the tribes such as Bhuiyan, Juang, Munda, Santhal, and Kondh. The chief slogan of the movement against mining has been "Our lands, our minerals and our rights". The villagers have been harassed by police and implicated in false cases for organising meetings, public rallies and hunger strikes. A number of villagers had been sent to jail in false cases between 1994 to 1999.

The villager and tribals of Rallagaruvu village in Vishakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh had put up a brave resistance against illegal mining by various companies in the last decades. Kondadora tribe is the biggest tribe in Northern Andhra Pradesh located in hilly terrains of the State. Rallagaruvu is famous for its calcite, firestone and mica reserves and is one of the most sought after places for mining! There have been hundreds of attempts at illegal acquisition of tribal lands. Due to prolonged struggle of the tribals that much of the land still remains free from the clutches of the illegal mining.

Different tribal movements can be said to centre around the problem of their identity. Coming to the North-East, the Bodo and Naga movements are good examples of how ethnic identity takes up political

route for raising their interests. In all these separatist movement, uneven development and modernisation, concentration of gains in some area and their non-dispersal to other, and urban-oriented models of growth are the chief causes.

Rise of tribal consciousness, tribal regionalism, frontier tribalism, etc. gained currency after the movements in North East Frontier areas. Tribal regionalism, political in nature, has been said to be a struggle for identity against alienation from basic sources, viz. land, forests and aspiration for preservation of traditional culture. Of late the movement in Tripura led by TUJS and Bodoland in Assam. Gorkhaland movements have transcended that stage of aspiration limited in culture. The newly emerged elites in these regions prefer to have a share in the power structure.

The regional leaders who improvise or manipulate identity symbols to mobilise group sentiment, could rarely assess the likely responses of the political authorities and the dominant social groups. As the movement proceeds and identity assertions tend to transform the concerned ethnic to a political conflict group, the leadership and the groups have to adopt modern skills and mobilise resources.

In the process, they become participants in modernization and get involved in the democratic power game. In both Gorkhaland and Jharkhand, such democratization has been evident. The Gorkhaland agitation gained momentum on issues such as Indo-Nepal treaty, inclusion of Nepalese language in the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution and other sundry economic factors.

The main thrust was on assertion of Indian Nepalese identity through citizenship demand. In the Gorkhaland Accord (1988) enacting the establishment of Gorkha Hill Development Council, both the main issues remained untouched. The identity problem was said to have been solved by putting the word 'Gorkha' in the Council.

It remains to be seen if the grant of Statehood for Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh ameliorates the conditions for India's Advisees. However, it is imperative that all Advise districts receive special attention from the Central Government in terms of investment in schools, participatory forest management and preservation, non-polluting industries and opportunities for the Advise communities and preserve their rich heritage. Advisees must have special access to educational, cultural and economic opportunities so as reverse the effects of colonialisation and earlier injustice experienced by the Advise communities.

Some of the most Important Tribale Movements-

At the same time, the country can learn much from the beauty of Advise social practices, their culture of sharing and respect for all their deep humility and love of nature and most of all their deep devotion to

social equality and civic harmony. Some of the most important tribal movements in India are as follows:
1. The Santhal Insurrection 2. The Munda Rebellion 3. The Bodo Movement 4. Jharkhand Movement.

1. The Santhal Insurrection:

The Santhals are an agricultural tribal group who are mainly concentrated in Bihar. The first peasant insurrection took place in 1855-1856, which arose due to the establishment of the Permanent Land Settlement of 1793. Following this settlement the Britishers took away all the lands from the Santhals. The zamindars took these lands on auction from the Britishers and gave them to the peasants for cultivation.

The zamindars, the money-lenders, and the government officers hiked the land tax and also oppressed and exploited the common peasants. Though the Santhals tolerated the injustices to some extent, later on they decided to raise in revolt against the zamindars, moneylenders, and traders.

The following were some of the main causes of the revolt:

i. There was a combined action of extortions by the zamindars, the police, the revenue, and the court. The Santhals had no option but to pay all the taxes and levies. They were abused and dispossessed of their own property.

ii. The Karendias who were the representatives of the Zamindars made several violent attacks on the Santhals.

iii. The rich peasants confiscated all the property, lands, and cattle of the Santhals.

iv. The moneylenders charged exorbitant rates of interest. The Santhals called the moneylenders exploiters and were known as "dikus".

v. For the railroad construction, the Europeans employed the Santhals for which they paid nothing to them. The Europeans often abducted the Santhal women and even murdered them. Their

The Munda Rebellion:

One of the prominent revolts of nineteenth century tribal rebellions in the Indian subcontinent was the Munda Rebellion. This rebellion was led by Birsa Munda in the south of Ranchi in the year 1899. The "Great Tumult" aimed to establish Munda raj and independence.

Traditionally, the Mundas enjoyed a preferential rent rate known as the khuntkattidar, which meant the original clearer of the forest. However, in course of time, the Mundas realized that this system of khuntkattidar is being corroded by the jagirdars and thikadars who came as moneylenders and as traders.

This kind of land alienation started before the advent of the Britishers. However, after the establishment of the British rule, the movement into the tribal regions by the non-tribals increased. This, in turn, led to increase in the practice of forced labor or beth began.

The corrupt contractors have indeed turned the region into a recruiting ground for bonded labor. Another major change was that a number of Anglican, Lutheran and Catholic missions established their stand during the British rule. The tribal people became more aware of their rights due to the spread of education, which was provided by the missionaries.

The social cleavage between the Christian and non-Christian Mundas deepened due to which the solidarity of the tribals got diluted. Therefore, there were two reasons for the revitalization of the movement, one was agrarian discontent and the other was the advent of Christianity. The movement aimed to reconstruct the tribal society from disintegration, which was staring in its face due to the stress and strains of the colonial rule.

Birsa Munda was born in 1874. He was the son of a sharecropper. He received some education from the missionaries. In the year 1893-1894, Birsa under the Vaishnava influence involved himself in a movement, which aimed to prevent the government from taking over the village wastelands.

In the year 1895, Birsa claimed to possess miraculous healing powers and declared himself as the prophet. Many people came to hear the new words from Birsa. Birsa criticized the traditional tribal customs, beliefs, and practices.

He encouraged the Mundas to fight against the superstitions, renounce animal sacrifices, stop taking the intoxicants, wear the sacred thread, and to continue the traditional tribal worship in the sacred grove. The Munda rebellion was essentially a revivalist movement that aimed to eliminate all the foreign elements from the Munda society in order to make it retain its original pure character.

The political and agrarian elements were then induced into the religious movement. Since 1858, Christian tribal peasants began to lead an offensive against the alien landlords and the beth begari system through lawsuits. This movement was popularly known as Mulkai ladai or Sardari ladai.

The total picture of the Birsa Munda's religious movement changed with the Sardari movement. Though, initially the Sardars were not interested in Birsa, they came to seek his help due to his popularity and for providing a stable base for their movement. Though, Birsa was influenced by the Sardars, he was not a puppet of the Sardars and despite a common background of the two movements, they differed in their nature.

The Sardars wanted only the elimination of the intermediary interests whereas Birsa was aiming at attaining complete independence, both religious and political. The main objective of the movement was to claim the rights of the Mundas and make them the real proprietors of the land. According to Birsa, such an ideal agrarian system would be possible only if they are free from the European officials and missionaries, which later on can contribute to the establishment of the Munda Raj.

Fearing a conspiracy, the Britishers arrested Birsa in 1895 and jailed him for two years. After returning from jail, Birsa became a more furious agitator. There were a series of night-time meetings, which were held in forest during 1898-1899 in which Birsa allegedly advocated the killing of thikadars, jagirdars, rajas, hakims, and Christians.

The activists attacked the police stations, officials, churches, and missionaries. Though there was a sign of antagonistic attitude against the dikus, there were very few cases of attacks on them. In 1899, on Christmas eve, the Mundas attacked the churches, which covered an area of six police stations in the districts of Singhbhum and Ranchi.

In January 1900, rumors were spread that Birsas' followers were attacking Ranchi. However, on January 9th, the rebels were defeated. Around 350 Mundas were arrested and among them three were hanged to death and 44 were transported for life. Birsa was also captured and he died in jail in 1900.

Through the survey and settlement operations of 1902-1910, the government attempted to redress the grievances of the Mundas. With the passing of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, the Mundas were able to get rid of the beth begari system and attained some recognition to their khuntkatti rights. The tribals of Chotanagpur also got legal protection for their land rights.

3. The Bodo Movement:

Bodoland is the name given by the Bodo nationalists in Assam, India, to represent their homeland. The Bodos exercise a complete control over the Bodoland. The major objective of the All Bodo Students Union and Bodo Liberation Tigers Force is to have a separate state of their own. The present demarcation of the Bodoland is the Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD) which is administered by an autonomous body known as Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

The official movement of the Bodos for an independent state of Bodoland started under the leadership of Upendranath Brahma of All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) on 2 March 1987. In fact, the call for the separate tribal homeland is not new in Assam. The Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) had raised their voice to have a separate home-land called "Udayachal".

However, the movement was suppressed by the then government. In order to spearhead the movement, the ABSU created a political organization called the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC). The movement of ABSU began with the slogan "Divide Assam Fifty-Fifty". This movement ended up with the creation of Bodo Accord in 1993. The accord soon collapsed and there was a split in ABSU and other political parties. This split caused violence in various Bodo areas and led to the displacement of about 70,000 people.

After the Bodo Accord, the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was constituted. Later on, the BAC was replaced by the BTQ which was established in accordance with the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) on 10 February 2003. It consisted of around 46 members of whom 40 were elected and the rest were nominated.

The BTC consists of 12 executive members who are responsible for the administration of a specific area of control called somisthi. The areas which come under the jurisdiction of Bodo Territorial Council is known as Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). The council has autonomy and control over the departments which are specified in the Memorandum of Understanding, however, it does not control the whole of district administration.

Till now, the BTC seems to have mostly addressed the issues pertaining to Bodo self-determination. This was indeed the first time when guarantees to all the hill tribes under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India have been extended to the tribes of the plains. This, in fact, also has led to some fears that non-tribals in the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District area might create problems.

4. Jharkhand Movement:

The term “Jharkhand” refers to a “forest region” and the term dates back to the sixteenth century. The forest region applies to the forested mountainous plateau region in eastern India, west of Ganges delta in Bangladesh, and south of Indo-Gangetic plain.

The area of Jharkhand consists of seven districts in Bihar, three in West Bengal, four in Orissa, and two in Madhya Pradesh. Around 90 per cent of the tribals in Jharkhand region live in Bihar districts. The two groups of tribals who were the main agitators of the movement were the Chotanagpurs and the Santhals

The Jharkhand region is easy to defend, as it is a dense forest area. It was tradition-ally autonomous from the central government until the seventeenth century. The reason why the region became popular was due to its riches that attracted the Mughal rulers. Eventually, beginning with the Mughal administration there began more interference of outsiders and there was also a shift from traditional collective system of land ownership to one of private landholders.

Such trends continued and were intensified under the British rule and later on resulted in the development of the system of “bonded labor”, which meant permanent and often hereditary debt slavery to the employer. In the late eighteenth century, the tribals resorted to rebellions. This made the government pass a number of laws in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to restrict alienation of the lands of the tribals and to safeguard the interests of the tribal peasants.

There were major cultural changes in the year 1845 due to the advent of Christian missions, which had a major role to play in the Jharkhand movement. Many tribes were converted into Christianity, and many schools for both the sexes have been started and higher institutions were established which aimed to train the tribals as teachers.

The tribals also had to face many problems due to the mineral wealth of Jharkhand. The region is a rich source of coal and iron. Apart from these, even bauxite, copper, asbestos, limestone, and graphite are also found. Coal mining in this region had started in the year 1856 itself. In the year 1907, the Tata Iron and Steel Factory was established in Jamshedpur.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the modern Jharkhand movement was initiated by the Christian tribal students and later continued by the non-tribals and the non-Christians. Differences developed among the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

However, these were resolved with the uniting of the various groups in the electoral arena and to an extent achieved some success at the local level in the 1930s. During this period the movement concentrated more on the Indian dikus than on the Britishers. The Jharkhand spokesmen made many representations to the British com-missions to grant a separate statehood and for the redressal of their grievances. However, all these were not much successful.

In 1947, due to independence much emphasis was laid on planned industrialization concentrating on heavy industries especially on the expansion of mining. The Jharkhand region has much economic importance as it contributes to 75 per cent of the revenue of Bihar. The government began acquiring the lands of the tribals, which left the tribals with very less compensation.

The government also felt that as the soils of the regions are poor, industrialization of such area would also help in providing employment for the local people. However, there was large influx of outsiders due to the industrial develop-ment and the local people began to feel inferior that they were not being employed in sufficient numbers. In 1971, the nationalization of mines resulted in violence, 50,000 miners of Jharkhand were fired and replaced by outsiders.

The government acquired lands for building dams and reservoirs. According to some observers, very little of the water and electricity produced were supplied to the region. The forest department encouraged is replacing the species of trees, which had multiple uses with others that had only commercial uses.

Shifting cultivation and forest grazing were not allowed. The local people of the region felt that the price, which the govern-ment paid for their forest products, was less. In course of time, these problems continued and were intensified.

In 1949, in the first general elections, the Jharkhand party under the leadership of Jaipal Singh secured majority of votes from the tribal districts. A memorandum was submitted to the Spates Reorganization Commission asking for the establishment of Jharkhand. However, the commission rejected this proposal of Jharkhand suite say-ing that it lacked a common language.

The Jharkhand Party continued as the largest opposition party in the Bihar legislative assembly. However, later it declined gradually. The biggest blow to the Jharkhand Party was in 1963, when the party was merged into Congress by Jaipal Singh without even consulting the members of the party. As a result, the Jharkhand party got fragmented into several small parties mostly based on the tribal lines which, has not been seen earlier.

Due to the differences in the level of education and economic development, there have been many disputes between the Christian tribals and non-Christian tribals. Separate organizations of the non-Christian tribals were formed in order to promote their inter-ests. In 1968, a study team of the parliament visited Ranchi and investigated the removal of certain groups from the official list of scheduled tribes.

Many petitions were submitted to the study team saying that the tribals who were converted into Christianity were no longer tribals, and that they were benefited by both missionary schooling and were also enjoying the government protection as scheduled tribes which is very unfair. There were also many allegations in the following years that the missionaries were foreign agitators.

The Provisional Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council consisting of 180 members was established in August 1995. The council has around 162 elected members and 18 appointed members.

Thus, these were some of the major tribal movements. We observe most of the tribal movements had agrarian, religious, political, and economic causes for their emergence. Finally, if tribal aspirations are continuously ignored, their movements are likely to reach enormous proportions, which later become difficult to manage.

Most of the time these movements are banned by the government as they have the tendency to create law and order crisis rather than understanding the genuine political and democratic aspirations of the people. The solution is not suppression but to develop a holistic perspective of the real trouble and make efforts to integrate the tribes into the main-stream, assuring their identity Tribal Movement before Independence