

## CHAPTER – 6

# FOREST SOCIETY AND COLONIALISM

### Forest Society and Colonialism

From the very beginning, forests have been a Chief resource for India. About 22-25 percent of the land is covered with forests, where several races and tribes inhabit. It is believed that they are the natives of Indian peninsula. That is why they are called 'Adivasis'. In India their population is next to Africa. There is a symbiotic relationship between adivasis and forests. Forests are deeply related with tribal economy and culture. They are totally dependent on forests for food, fuel, wood, household, stuff, herbs, medicines, fodder and agricultural equipments. Their culture is influenced by forests. They worship a variety of trees. The tribes living in forest society classify themselves on the basis of races (castes) in place of class i.e. Paharia, Chero, Kol, Urano, Ho, Santhal, Chuar, Khariya, Bhil, Munda and so on.

Bihar is a chief tribe in India which resides in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Tripura. Gond is the next chief tribe residing mostly in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. The Santhals, the third chief tribe are generally living in Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal. The tribes like Urano, Meena, Munda and Khond also live in these very states.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these tribes used the forests for their livelihood. Their lives are very simple and in their social life, they adopt the policy of non-interference. But by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, they became prey to colonialism. That is why they raised their heads many times against colonialism with weapons which resulted in the revolution in 1857 and in several other movements. Though some measures for improvement were

taken up, yet it is a vital question why these simple forest dwellers raised their weapons. For the answer, it is necessary to peep carefully into the various aspects of the forest society and its culture.

### Political life

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the forest society was divided into tribes. Each tribe was organized under a headman (Mukhiya) for their safety. The main duty of the headman was to provide safety for his tribe. Gradually these haeadmen started their monopoly on the tribes. They succeeded in gaining some privileges for themselves. To continue as a headman, it was necessary to be skilled in wars and able to safeguard his tribe. Every tribe had its own system of governance. In this system the power was decentralized. Traditional tribal institutions were endowed with legal judicial and executive powers. 'Maniki' and 'Munda' systems in Singhbhoom and 'Manjhi' and 'Paragnait' in Santhal Pargana are in vogue even these days. These systems are commanded by the headman of the tribes. During the British rule they were tempted by the Englishmen and became their supporters. They helped the British in the collection of revenue even by a harsh way. But later, when the adivasis were facing political exploitation, the headman helped their people in many places.

#### Political Life

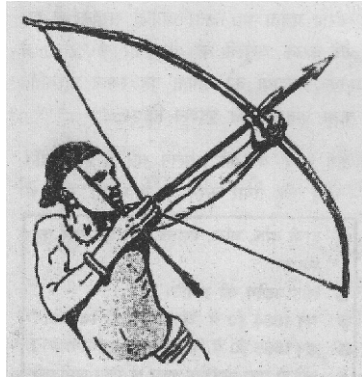
- Organisation of tribes under headman
- Decentralizations of power
- 'Maniki' and 'Munda' systems for revenue collection in Singhbhum
- 'Manjhi' and 'Paragnait' systems in Santhal Paragana

### Social life

The Adivasis were the men of meek and mild nature. Generally they kept themselves along from the rest of the societies, but the Englishmen interfered in their social life. For economic benefit, they instated the leaders of the tribes as landlords. The intrusion of Christian missionaries in

#### Social Life

- Interests in dancing, singing and hunting
- 'Sarhul', the main festival
- Ban on hunting



Adivasi people with Teer Dhanush



Dancing Adivasi people

the forest society was encouraged which shattered their social systems. Their intimate relationship with forests was also broken down. They cut wood in the forest, and used it for fuel. They gathered grams for fodder. Hunting deer, partridge and other birds and animals was their hobby and play. Their social life was so simple that they led their lives quite freely. Dancing and singing were their hobbies. They engaged themselves in cultivation. Their songs and dances were influenced by various aspects of agriculture. Their most important festival 'Sarhul' was celebrated on the third of the Chaitra bright fortnight. This festival is very popular even these days. The women in tribal society were completely free and used to help male members in earning their livelihood.

To be affected by the colonisation, the British banned the hunting of small creatures but they were free to prey big ones. For the British large wild and savage animals were the symbols of primitive society. They believed that by killing dangerous animals, they would civilize the tribal people. As a result, various species of animals began to be extinct. They thus tried their best to destroy the social environment of the forest society. It caused to originate opposability against them.

### **Economic life**

The economic life of the forest society was based on agriculture. They did farming at different places by 'Ghumantu', 'Jhoom', or 'Podu'

### **Economic life**

- Agriculture based economic life
- 'Jhoom' or 'Podu' method farming

methods. Where they thought the place to be unfertile, they cleared the forest and prepared a new land for farming. The Englishmen had to face difficulties in imposing and collecting land-cess (lagan), so they banned these methods of farming. Excessive land-cess and oppressive ways of revenue collection enraged the tribal people. Many a society had to change their habitation. Afterward, they raised their heads against the English.

The Adivasis were engaged in farming as well as in other industries. They were in the trade of ivory, bamboo, spices, fibres, rubber etc. and prepared lac. They

reared up the worms of lac on butea, plum and kusum trees and prepared lac in factories. In 1970, the trade of lac began to flourish.

- Trade of Ivory, Bamboos, Spices, Fibres and Rubber. Development of lac industries
- Establishment of 'forest service' in 1864.
- Indian Forest Act in 1865
- Started Zamindari system by the British for economic benefit

They were engaged also in tasar industries. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British started clearing the forests for manufacturing rails, coaches and seats which affected the lifestyle of the adivasis. Dietrich Vandis, a German forest expert started 'forest service' in 1864 and in 1865. Indian Forest Act was enacted which banned the tribal people from cutting the trees and safeguarded the forests for wood production. It adversely affected the social life as well as economic of the adivasis. The British government started Zamindari system there to collect revenue. Now the adivasis were economically exploited by the landlords, and money-lenders. Gradually they turned from farmers into labourers and their economic condition got worse. They nowhere got justice. The plice helped money-lenders instead of them. For debts, they usurped their land, cattle and so on. In this situation the adivasis had to keep themselves as bonded labours as a result, their economic and physical exploitation grew up. So in this situation they started organizing themselves on the basis of castes as Santhali, Kol, Munda etc. But by these organisation, they never attacked on their own another groups.

## Religious life

From the very beginning, these adivasis of forest society were in favour of non-interference policy. They were always ready with arms and weapons to check any kind of foreign intrusion. The British adopted the policy of commercial colonisation and tried to intrude tribal areas but for a long time they did not succeed. So they made Christian missionaries intrude into the tribal regions to educate and civilize the people there, so that they could get a proper way to serve their purpose. Afterwards, these missionaries began to denounce their culture and religion and started their religious conversion. A large number of adivasis adopted Christianity and improved their conditions. They got qualitative change by education but they began to hate their own races. The adivasis took it as encroachment on their social and religious lives by the English and started resisting them. In this situation, the religious feelings inherited in the forest society originated several leaders and movements.

### Religious Life

- Intrusion of Christian missionaries and evocation for religious conversion of adivasis
- Religious dissatisfaction in all tribes after hurting religious feeling.

These leaders believed that God would remove their miseries and rescue them from foreign exploitation. He has magical power to diffuse the effect of cartridges. This self-confidence of these leaders provoked the adivasis to voices against the British. According to the historical proofs, in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the efforts of the British to intrude Chhotanagpur and Santhal Paragana were opposed forcibly and violently.

## Paharia movement

This was a warlike race. The people of this race were inhabitants of Rajmahal hills in Bhagalpur. Here at first, the British converted the headmen into landlords and authorised them to take revenue. They provoked the money-lender, contractors, revenue officers, police and forest officers to exploit the adivasis. As a result, they were forced to be trapped into debts and handed over their fertile land to non-adivasis. It ruined the economic base of

the tribes and made them poor. So for the first time a rebel against the revenue policy of landlords broke out. Tilka Manjhi was the leader of this rebel. He was the first Santhali who not only rebelled against the landlords but also made violent action against the landlords but also made violent action against the British. Tilka Manjhi was born in 1750 in Tilakpur village near



**Tilka Manjhi**

Sultanganj in Bhagalpur Commissionery. In 1779 he for the first time raised arms to lessen land-revenue and get the land of the farmers back from the landlords. The British army helped the landlords. So Tilka Manjhi made the Tilakur forest his shelter where he planned to attack his enemies. He attacked Augustus Clive Land, the first collector of Bhagalpur because he did not like that any outsider should interfere the lives of forest and tribal society of hills, exploit them and hurt their social and religious feelings. He is the first Santhal, who attacked the Collector with bow and arrow in 1784 and wounded him which later caused Clive Land to die. For his violent action and anti-British policy, he was arrested and put to death in 1785 on the roundabout in Bhagalpur hanging with Banyan tree. Tilka Manjhi thus died for the freedom of his region. Though his movement failed, it paved the way for the forthcoming Santhal movement. Tilka Manjhi showed an example of sacrifice for the sake of his motherland fighting against the exploitation and oppression by the British. The place where he was hanged is now known as Tilka Manjhi Chowk (Bhagalpur). The stature of Amar Shaheed Tilka Manjhi tells us the story of sacrifice to protect the rights of poor farmers.

### **Tamar movement**

In 1789, the Urano tribe of Chhotangpur started movement against the exploitation by landlords. In history, it is known as Tamar movement. It continued till 1794 and it ended cruelly with the help of the British. But the fire of revolt did not put out. Further it broke out with the revolts of Munda and Santhal.

### **Chero movement**

The Chero tribe residing in Palamu region of Jharkhand revolted against their ruler, Chudaman Roy. In 1800, they revolted against the exploitation by the British under the leadership of Bhushan Singh. The British army came to help the ruler. They under the command of Colonel Jones finished the movement and in 1802 Bhushan Singh was hanged to death.

### **Chuar movement**

The Chuars were found in Midanapur, Bankuda and Manbhoom regions of Bengal province. They were dissatisfied with the revenue system of the British. So under the leadership of Shiromani, the queen of Karangarh they unfurled the flag of revolt. This revolution against the British continued for a long time. In 1789, it was at its climax. But on April 6, 1799 Queen Shiromani was arrested and sent into prison in Kolkata. But the revolt was not finished completely. Later they joined the revolt done by Ganga Narayan of the Bhoomij tribe.

#### **Different tribal movement**

- Paharia movement
- Tamar movement
- Chero movement
- Chuar movement
- Ho movement
- Kol movement
- Bhoomij movement
- Santhal movement
- Munda movement
- Kandh movement

### **Ho movement**

In 1820-1821, a great revolt broke out in Chhotanagpur of Singhbhum. Jagannath Singh was the king who accepted the protection of the British. The Ho opposed the exploitation and growing power of the king. But the British army finished it cruelly. Later they joined Munda movement.

### **Kol movement**

Kol movement was started in 1831 in Chhotanagpur region by Munda, Uraon and several other tribes. It has a special importance in the history of India. From the very earlier, they were living peaceful tribal lives. Later when British revenue system and exploitation policy were imposed on them by the landlords, Kols opposed 'Manaki' and 'Mahto' who were as landlords. According to their custom, a post named 'Pahan' was created to perform



secular activities. Manaki and Mahto were for his assistance. These Manakis who were once co-operators of the Kols, became landlords and started their social and economic exploitation for not paying the land-cess. A large number of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh traders entered his area and became money-lenders. The land of Kols began to go out of their possession. In this situation, the Kols revolted against the landlords and dikus (non-tribal races). This revolt spread to Palamu region.

About 800 to 1000 people were killed. The aggressive and violent form of this revolt drew the attention of the British. Though this revolt was suppressed, the English knew that they could not ignore the Kol society. As a result, 'South-West Frontier Agency' came into existence to establish exploitation-free governance for the Kols and they were assured to make the criminal court simple and easy. Later these Kols were proved a significant source of inspiration in the freedom movement of India.

### **Bhoomij movement**

In 1932, the Bhoomij movement started under the leadership of Ganga Narayan, the son of the landlord of Virbhoom. In history, it is known as 'Ganga Narayan Hungama'. The British government imposed so much revenue on them that they with the supports of Ho and Kol revolted against colonial government. All the tribes mentioned above played an important role in the 'Sipahi mutiny'. When the mutiny broke out, they were in the army in Chaibasa battalion. They plundered the treasuries of Ranchi and Doranda and opened the gate of the jail. They opposed the English in all possible ways for the safety of their rights.

### **Santhal movement**

Among the revolts done by the adivasis, the Santhal movement has a significant place because the people of this very region first started the revolt and played a key role in the revolution in 1887. The region from Bhagalpur to Rajmahal which was known as 'daman-e-koh' was the dwelling place of the most of the Santhals. To be vexed with the non-tribes and the English, they unified themselves. The four sons of Chulu Santhal of Bhaganadih Siddhu,



Kanhu, Chand and Bhairav encouraged the Santhals. Siddhu declared himself the incarnation of 'Thakur'. By 1854, the adivasis started organizing meetings to get rid of excessive imposition of revenue, social ban and several other economic troubles. A meeting of Santhals was held on 400 villages were collected with arms and the order of Thakur was read out that they should revolt against the anarchy of landlords, money-lenders and government to establish their own system based on justice and religion that is the governance of Satyug. Sidhu and Kanhu declared freedom. It was said that there was no government or officer over them and the Santhali government was established. These adivasis held out a march in villages.



**Sidhu**

In July, 1855, on the call of men and women, the revolt of the Santhals started. Very soon about 60 thousands Santhals collected with arms and weapons. Thousands of adivasis were told to be prepared for the revolt. Started with the murder of tyrannical daroga, Mahesh Lal in Disi. Government offices and the houses of money-lenders and Englishmen were attacked.

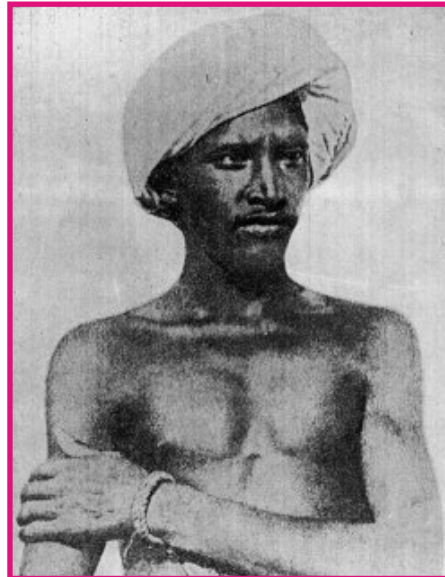
The main cause of Santhal's dissatisfaction was the railway project from Bhagalpur to Vardhwan. The contractors engaged a large number of labourers but did not pay them their proper wages. When they refused to work, they were beaten badly. The rebellions misbehaved railway contractors and project engineers because they used to compel them to work without proper wages, they disturbed railway services from Bhagalpur to Rajmahal. A great many Englishmen were killed. They attacked those people who were the supporters of non-tribes (dikus) and colonialism.

The British got afraid of the organised revolt of the adivasis and they suppressed them with the help of army who were called from Kolkata and Purnea. About 5000 Santhals with Kanhu were killed. The British destroyed a great number of villages and brutally and imposed Marshall Law in disturbed areas. Siddhu was arrested with many other leaders. In this revolt, the Santhals showed unperishable spirit, but it came to be failure because they had no modern technology of wars. They mostly fought with bows and

arrows. When the revolution broke out in 1857, these Santhals were with revolutionaries and helped them against the British. Though the Santhal movement brought about no remarkable changes in situation, the British adopted a new administrative policy for the region. In 1885, the 'Ordinance 37' was passed and Santhal Paragana became a district. It was declared 'excluded area' and administration came under the direct control of Governor General.

### **Munda movement**

In 1899-90, Munda adivasis in Chhotanagpur raised their voice against colonialism under the leadership of Birsa Munda. Birsa Munda was born on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1874 in Ulikatu village near Tamar in Palamu district. From his very childhood, he was brilliant. He expressed his anxiety for the poverty and exploitation of adivasis and got angry with the landlords who were the supporters of colonial revenue and judicial system and exploitation policy. He was deeply influenced by religion and had firm faith in God. So in 1895, he declared himself as a



**Birsa Munda**

messenger of God. On the basis of religious movement, he started equipping adivasis with arms and weapons, and made them aware of their rights. He awakened not only Mundas but also other tribes and unified them. On 25<sup>th</sup> December, 1899, he attacked Christian missioneries. On 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1900 the British government badly suppressed this movement. About 200 men and women were killed and 300 captured. Several leaders were also arrested. The government announced an award of Rs. 500/- for his arrest and as a result, on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1900 Birsa Munda was arrested and in June he died of Cholera in Ranchi jail.

Though the policy of British government suppressed the movement of Birsa Munda, yet it had an impact on government. It was a warning to British government. So, the government made complete arrangement to remove dissatisfaction of Munda and other tribes. The result of Birsa's movement was that reasonable and responsible government came into action. Later, this movement proved a source of inspiration for Tara Bhagat who was participating in freedom movement (1914). The government did a lot to improve the conditions of the adivasis.

### **Kandh movement**

Besides these tribal movements the Kandh movement of Orissa is also very remarkable. Kandh used to live in huge plateau region spreading from the Madras to Bengal. In this tribe, 'Mariaa Pratha' (Man killing tradition) was in vogue to get rid of miseries and troubles. In 1837, the British government tried to ban this vogue. At that time, a leader named Chakra Bisoi opposed strongly and accused the British of interfering into the social and religious life of the adivasis. In 1857, the Kandh also raised weapons against the English.

The 'Bhuiyan' and 'Juang' tribes of Orissa also revolted against the feudal and suppression policy of the king. The flag of revolt was unfurled in 1867-68 under the leadership of Dharanidhar Nayak.

Revolts against colonialism started in many other states of India. In 1879-80, the adivasis revolted against excessive imposition of revenue and 'vetti pratha' (forcibly labour tradition). Bhil and Gond tribes also revolted against the British government for their existence.

As a result, in 1935, the then legislative assembly passed the resolution of education and reservation for the adivasis. The constitution of free India declared them backward class and made arrangement of reservation and all types of privileges for them in article 342. In 1952, the government implemented 'New Forest Policy' which has been amended time to time. This is a significant step taken by the government for the protection of forests and the rights of adivasis.

Though the adivasis dwelling in forest society were free from the colonial exploitation, yet their movement did not stop. Only their forms were changed. These movements were transformed into regional movements and they started demanding separate states for them. On 1<sup>st</sup> November, 2000 the government of India formed Chhatisgarh from Madhya Pradesh and on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2000 Jharkhand from Bihar.

Thus we find that the tribes inhabiting in forest society struggled long against colonial exploitation which paved a way for reformative activities in future.

### EXERCISE

#### I. Objective questions:

1. When was Indian Forest Act implemented?  
a. 1864                      b. 1865                      c. 1885                      d. 1874
2. When was Tilka Manjhi born?  
a. 1750                      b. 1774                      c. 1785                      d. 1850
3. When was Tamar movement started?  
a. 1784                      b. 1788                      c. 1789                      d. 1799
4. Where did 'Chero' tribes live in?  
a. Ranchi                      b. Patna                      c. Bhagalpur                      d. Palamu
5. Which tribe formed 'South-West Frontier Agency' to establish a governance free from exploitation?  
a. Chero                      b. Ho                      c. Kol                      d. Munda

6. When was the Bhoomij movement started?  
a. 1779                      b. 1832                      c. 1855                      d. 1869
7. Who was the leader of the Santhal movement in 1855?  
a. Shibu Soren                      b. Siddhu  
c. Birsa Munda                      d. Mangal Pandey
8. When did Birsa Munda attack Christian missionaries?  
a. 24 December, 1889                      b. 25 December, 1899  
c. 25 December 1900                      d. 8 January, 1900
9. In which article of Indian constitution, the adivasis were declared backward class?  
a. Article 342                      b. Article 352  
c. Article 352                      d. Article 360
10. When did Jharkhand get the status of a state?  
a. November, 2000                      b. 15 November, 2000  
c. 15 December, 2000                      d. 15 November 2001

**II. Fill in the blanks:**

1. Most of the tribes live in \_\_\_\_\_.
2. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the forest society was divided into several \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ intruded in the forest society with the purpose of imparting education.
4. Dietrich Vandis, a German foreign expert established \_\_\_\_\_ in 1864.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ was the first Santhali who raised weapon on the English.
6. Ho tribes were the inhabitants of \_\_\_\_\_ in Chhotanagpur.
7. The region from Bhagalpur to Rajmahal was called \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The Santhal movement broke out in \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Birsa Munda was born in \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Chhatisgarh was formed in \_\_\_\_\_.

### III. Short answer type question:

1. Throw light on the political status of the forest society.
2. How was the social life of the forest society?
3. How was the economic life of the forest society in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
4. How did the Christian missionaries influence the forest society in 18<sup>th</sup> century?
5. What was the aim of 'Indian Forest Act'?
6. What do you mean by Chero movement?
7. What was Tamar movement?
8. Write about 'Chuar movement'.
9. Where did Chakra Bisoi do for the tribes of Orissa?
10. What were the consequences of the regional movements of the tribes?

### IV. Long answer type questions:

1. Throw light on the tribal life in India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
2. Who was Tilka Manjhi? What did he do for the tribal area?
3. What do you mean by Santhal revolt? What role did they play in the revolution of 1857?
4. Who was the leader of Munda movement? What did he do against colonial exploitation?
5. What are the reasons that compelled the English to adopt the policy of interference in the forest society?

