

Chapter-04

Tribals, Dikus and The Vision of A Golden Age

The tribes had customs and rituals that were very different from those laid down by Brahmas. they also did not had any social distinctions.

In mid-1870s Birsa was born in a family of Mundas-a tribal group that lived in Chhotanagpur. He is known to oppose British interference in the name of administration in forest areas and revolted in 1895 till his death in 1900.

How did Tribal Groups Live: By the 19th century, tribal people in different parts of India were involved in a variety of activities such as subsistence farming, herding and collection of forest products.

Some were Jhum Cultivators:

1. Jhum cultivation that is shifting cultivation was done on small patches of land, mostly in forests. (*BEWAR= term used for shifting cultivation in Madhya Pradesh)
2. The cultivators cut the treetops to allow sunlight to reach ground, and burnt the vegetation on the land to clear it for cultivation.
3. Once the crop was ready and harvested they moved to another field and left that field fallow for several years.
4. This type of cultivation is considered to be the primitive type of cultivation and took as the loss to the forest wealth.

Some were Hunters and Gatherers:

1. In many regions tribal groups lived by hunting animals and gathering forest produce.
2. In Khonds were hunters and gatherers living in the forests of Odisha.
3. They used many forest shrubs and herbs for medicinal purpose, and sold forest produce in the local markets.
4. Baigas of central India reluctant to do work for other.
5. Tribal groups often needed to buy and sell in order to be able to get the goods that were not produced within the locality. This led to their dependence on traders and

moneylenders.

6. Tribals were mainly depend on barter system.

Some Herded Animals:

1. Many tribal groups lived by herding and rearing animals and gathering forest produce.
2. They were pastoralists who moved with their herds of cattle or sheep according to the seasons.
3. The Van Gujjars of Punjab hills and Labadis of Andhra Pradesh were cattle herders. The Gaddis of Kulu were shepherds and the Bakarwals of Kashmir reared goats.
4. Later by British laws grazing on forest land was stoped and it became the reason of discontent for tribals.

Some took to Settled Cultivation:

1. Many tribal groups had begun to settle down instead of moving from place.They began to use the plough and gradually got rights over the land they lived on.
2. Few tribes such as Mundas considered the clan rights over land and assumed the land to be belonged to the whole clan.
3. British officials saw settled tribal groups like the Gonds and Santhals as more civilized than hunter-gatherers or shifting cultivators.
4. Extraction of huge revenue was also done from the tribals and in case of non payement of revenue thier lands were taken away and it became the reason of discord.

How did Colonial Rule Affect Tribal Lives: The lives of tribal groups changed during British rule. Their faiths were tried to be changed wia christian missionaries and laws related to forest were had direct impact on their traditional rights.

What Happened to Tribal Chiefs:

1. Before the arrival of the British, tribal chiefs enjoyed economic power, and had the right to administer and control their territories.
2. Under British rule, the functions and powers of the tribal chiefs changed as they were allowed to keep their land titles but lost there administrative rights and were forced to follow laws made by British officials in India.
3. Rules made by British took over the entiltements and power to adminster the forest area.

What Happened to the Shifting Cultivators:

1. The British were uncomfortable with the shifting cultivators as it was more easy to control a settled group.
2. The British wanted to regular revenue source for the state and introduced land settlements.
3. The British effort to settle jhum cultivators was not very successful in North-Eastern part of India as the land was not fertile enough.
4. After facing widespread protests, the British had to allow them the right to carry on shifting cultivation in some parts of the forest.
5. In most of the central parts shifting cultivation was prohibited and lands were assigned to do the cultivation.

Forests Laws and Their Impact:

1. The life of tribal groups was directly connected to the forest.
2. The British extended their control over all forests and declared them as state property.
3. Reserved forests were for producing timber which the British wanted but for the purpose of cheap labour the forest village were settled within the forest.
4. In reserved forests people were not allowed to move freely or practice jhum cultivation.
5. This law impacted the very survival of tribals as they were mainly depended on forest and its products. Many tribal groups reacted against the colonial forest laws and rose in an open rebellion.

The Problem with Trade:

1. During the 19th century, tribal groups found the traders and moneylenders were coming into forests and offering cash loans to the tribal people and asking them to work for wages. This led the trapping of tribals in the vicious cycle of debt and increased the misery of their life.
2. Indian silk was in demand in European markets during the 18th century.
3. The Santhals of Hazaribagh reared cocoons. The traders sent in their agents who gave loans to the tribal people and collected the cocoons.
4. The cocoons were exported to Burdwan or Gaya to sold at 5 times the price.
5. Different crops were grown by tribals and were taken over by traders at lesser prices

and were sold in market at higher prices. This left the tribals for little to survive.

The Search for Work:

1. The plight of the tribals who had to go far away from their homes in search of work was even worse.
2. The tribals were recruited in large numbers to work for tea plantations and coal mines through contractors low wages, and prevented them from returning home.

A Closer Look: The tribal groups rebelled in different of the country against the changes in laws, restrictions on their practices, the new taxes they had to pay and exploitation by traders and moneylenders.

Uprisings of Tribals:

Kol uprising - 1831-32

Santhal uprising -1855

Munda uprising - 1895-1900

Bastar uprising - 1910

Birsa Munda:

1. A movement began under the leadership of Birsa Munda.
2. The British officials were worried as the political aim of the Birsa movement was to drive out missionaries, moneylenders, Hindu landlords and the government and set up a Munda Raj with Birsa at its head.
3. In 1895, Birsa Munda was arrested.
4. He was released in 1897 and he toured the villages to gather support. He urged people to destroy 'Ravana' (dikus and the European), and establish a kingdom under his leadership.
5. In 1900 Birsa died of cholera and the movement faded out.

Effects of Uprisings:

1. British made the laws stricter so that moneylanders could not exploit the tribes by snatching away their lands.
2. It showed the power of tribals that they can also fight for their rights and could be heard.