

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Tribal Rebellion in Chhattisgarh

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Abstract:

The various tribes in Chhattisgarh region are Gonds, Muria, Bhumja, Baiga, Kamars, Kawars, Halkas etc. A few of the tribes, particularly the Gonds have influenced by the Hindu tradition and have in turn been influenced local practices in the Hindu tradition as well. Other tribes like Kamars and the Baiga have largely been untouched by the main stream and have retained more of their traditional culture and way of life. Chhattisgarh is known for its unique tribal culture in the world. The tribes of Chhattisgarh had started many rebellions against British to get freedom.

Keywords: Gonds, Muria, Bhumja, Halkas, Rebellion, Paralkot, Koi, Maria, Rani, Bhumkal, Tarapur

1. Introduction

Chhattisgarh has witnessed several tribal rebellions starting from the late eighteenth century to the first few decades of the twentieth century. Some of these tribal revolts were localized while other revolts were more wide spread. Geographically too, the rebellions were not centered in one region. In some of the revolts the precipitating factors were immediate and local in nature and some revolts took its time to new. However the central objectives of these rebellions remained largely common and unchanged. All these rebellions focused and asserted the traditionally inalienable right of the tribal's on the local resources of land and forests; often the mobilization was around the issues of tradition, culture and the tribal way of life. These rebellions also protested against an alien system of governance and an alien political, economic and social order that had been forcibly imposed upon them by the British.

These tribal rebellions, although they predominantly took place in Bastar were spread across the various tribal areas of Chhattisgarh as well. The assimilation of this tradition of protest and rebellion by the tribal's well be critical in any attempt to forge a Chhattisgarh identity and for evolving vibrant and inclusive Chhattisgarh ethos.

2. Tribal Protests and Rebellions

Chhattisgarh is generally perceived as a tribal dominated state. Although this is factually incorrect, it does reflects the significantly high proportion of tribals in there region. It also underscores a fundamentally important point that the tribals in Chhattisgarh have been able to retain their culture and traditional way of life despite of modernity. While tribal people constitute 32.5% of the population of Chhattisgarh was Durg-12.6%,Raipur-18.6% Rajnandgaow-25.3%,Bilaspur-23.4%,Sarguja-54.8%,Raigarh-45.5%,Bastar-67.7% .

Key Rebellions are:-

- Halka rebellion-(1774-1779)
- Bhopal Patnam-(1795)
- Paralkot rebellion-(1825)
- Tarapur rebellion-(1842-54)
- Marien rebellion-(1842-63)
- First freedom struggle-(1856-57)
- Koi revolt- (1859)
- Muria rebellion-(1876)
- Rani rebellion-(1878-82)
- Bhumkal rebellion-(1910)

2.1. Halba Rebellion(1774-1779)

The Halba rebellion is a very important event in the history of Bastar as it was responsible for the decline of the chalukya dynasty which in turn created circumstances that first bought the Marathas and then the British to the region. The rebellion was initiated in 1774 by the Governor of Dongar, Ajmer Singh with the intention of establishing an independent kingdom at Dongar. The Halba tribe and Halba soldiers supported him. However the fundamental reasons for the rebellion were economic in nature. There had

been a prolonged famine which had severely affected the people who had very little cultivable land. The presence of Maratha forces and the terror caused by the east India Company in these adverse circumstances precipitated the rebellion. The stronger armies of Bastar supported by the British and the Maratha crushed the rebellion however, revolt created a condition for the decline of the Chalukya dynasty which in turn significantly altered the history of Bastar. The fact clearly indicates that this rebellion was more defensive in nature and was waged by the tribals to protect their land and tradition.

2.2. *The Paralkot Rebellion*

The rebellion was supported by the Abhujmarias and was led by Gend Singh a fellow Abhujmarias, one of the objectives of the rebellion was to establish a world free of loot, plunder and exploitation. The presence of the Marathas and the British threatened the identity of the Abhujmarias and they resisted this through organizing the rebellion of Paralkot in 1825. The rebels were also opposing the taxes levied by the Maratha rulers. In essence this rebellion was directed against the foreign interference and control of Bastar and wanted to re-establish the freedom of Bastar.

2.3. *The Rebellion of Tarapur (1842-54)*

This was once again the assertion of the tribals against the invasion of their local culture and the tampering with their traditional principles of social, economic and political organization. It started with an opposition to taxes levied under the pressure of Anglo-Maratha rule. For the tribals these experiences of coercive taxation were alien and new and so they opposed them. The local Diwan became a symbol of oppression and bore the brunt of tribal anger.

2.4. *The Maria Rebellion*

This rebellion was lasted nearly 20 years from 1842-1863 was seemingly in favour of an inhuman practice of human sacrifice. In reality the revolt was against the insensitive and intrusive faith. The Anglo-Maratha combine handling of tribal didn't hesitate to enter and pollute the temple of Danteswari. The facts clearly indicate that this rebellion was more defensive in nature and was waged by the tribals to protect their land and tradition. Furer Hamendorf (Aboriginal Rebellions in the Deccan, Man in India, No.4 1945,p.p.2089)writes that all these rebellions were defensive movements, they were the last resort of tribesman driven to despair by the encroachments of outsiders on their land and economic resources. What is surprising is not the occurrence of uprisings, but the infrequency of violent reaction on the part of the aboriginals to the loss of their ancestral land and to their economic enslavement. Hutton extends the analysis and writes (as quoted in H.L.Shukla,Baster Ka Mukti Sangram,P.118) that early days of British administration were greatly detrimental to the economic position of tribes due to ignorance and neglect of their rights and customs by the British.

2.5. *First Freedom struggle (1856-57)*

Bastar was also actively involved in the struggle for Independence of 1857 with Southern Bastar as the centre of revolt; under the leadership of Dhruvarao a battle was waged against the British. He belonged to one of the tribes called Dorlaon and was supported by his tribesmen. Later in 1858 Gonds challenged the British in several battles.

2.6. *Koi Revolt*

In 1859 a very important rebellion began to take shape in Southern Bastar with the tribals refusing to let contractors undertake cutting of Sal trees. The people of these Zamindaris, were called Kois. This rebellion was against the decision of the British to give contracts for cutting forests to contractors from Hyderabad. These on forests and natural resources contractors were also responsible for the exploitation of the tribals. The local tribals in 1859 decided that they would not allow the felling of a single tree. The British took this as a challenge to the might of the empire and used coercive methods to continue the felling of trees. This rebellion was the clear assertion of the tribals of their inalienable rights.

2.7. *Muria Revolt*

In 1867,Gopinath kapardas was appointed the Diwan of Bastar state and was responsible for the tribal population. Tribals from different parganas jointly requested the king to remove the Diwan but the king didn't concede to these demands.This led to the muria revolt of 1876.The rebelling tribals surrounded Jagdalpur on 2 March 1876, the king with great difficulty was able to inform the British forces. Finally a strong force was sent by the Resident of Orissa, crushed the rebellions.

2.8. *Bhumkal Rebellion*

The most wide spread and important rebellion was the Bhumkal rebellion of 1910,that spread to 46 out of the 84 parganas of Bastar. The term Bhumkal is significant as it refers to the social solidarity of the members of a clan that binds them to each other and to their specific Bhumor land. The basic reasons listed for the Bhumkal rebellion by historians clearly reaffirms the findings from earlier rebellions. It continued the traditions and their way of life for reasserting their traditional rights on forests, land and natural resources. One of the main reasons for the rebellion is given by stand a dispossession of traditional forests and land resources had been the most important case of the Bhumkal rebellion. In 1908 the forest were first made reserved forests and the contractors given rights to take timber and wood for railway sleepers. This deprived the tribals of one of the main sources of their livelihood heasing out of liquor monopolies also aggregated the situation as the locally made country liquor was declared legal. The introduction of education and school was seen by the tribals as an attempt by the state to subvert their culture and therefore it became a precipitating factor. Finally the brutality and exploitation by the police, over the people including Begar culminated in the Bhumkal rebellion.

The socio-religious reform movement and the tribal rebellions contributed although indirectly, for emerging consciousness in the region. Guru Ghasidas clearly articulated the need to consolidate and create regional consciousness' and solidarity to fight against exploitation. Similarly, other leaders with their message of equality and solidarity also influenced the unfolding regional narrative. The tribal rebellion deeply affected the political, social and economic discourse of Chhattisgarh. The issue of people's right over local resources was brought to the centre stage. It also raised the fundamental question of identity and preserving traditional culture and way of life. The evolution and formation of a formal Chhattisgarh identity coincided with the national movement and during this period the process of crystallisation of a Chhattisgarh identity was initiated and a distinct identity started emerging and taking definite shape in the social and cultural sphere.

Pandit Sunderlal Sharma, Thakur Pyarelal Singh and Khubchand Baghel were members of Indian National movement in Chhattisgarh. These leaders did not confine themselves merely to political activity but they were involved in initiating as well as actively participating in social-cultural reform movement. These leaders also reiterated the fact that Chhattisgarh had a distinct socio-cultural identity and used this as a base for reforming and encouraging the formation of a Chhattisgarhi consciousness amongst the masses through literary drives, cultural activities and social reform programmes.

The literature of the period also reflected the search for and an attempt to establish a distinctive identity. As early as 1901 MR Sapre from Pendra Road published a magazine called Chhattisgarh Mitra which focused on the region. Khubchand Baghel who was waging a struggle against untouchability, wrote plays called Tarnail Singh and unchnleech. During this period, leaders were also writing plays that focused on social issues in the context of Chhattisgarhi identity. Pandit Sunderlal Sharma wrote Daanlila and R. C. Deshmukh wrote Naacha and Gumbad. Vaman Rao Deshmukh an important cooperative leader of the times was specifically writing about the identity of Chhattisgarh.

Pandit Sunderlal Sharma, who was one of the most prominent leaders of central India, fought against the caste system and worked continuously for an improvement in the condition of dalits. In 1917 he broke the forests laws in Sihawa with the support of the tribals. There years later in 1920, Pt. Sharma initiated the Nahar Satyagrah in Kandal village, Durg district against the tax on water. In 1925, we entered a temple with a group of dalits. Thakur Pyarlal Singh also known as the father of the cooperative movement in Chhattisgarh, was a Gandhian with a reformatory zeal. He organized the first labour movement of Chhattisgarh in Rajnandgaon in 1920. This movement was started to demand a fixed number of working hours. Later in the same region the second and the third labour movement of 1924 and 1925 were also organized under the leadership of Pyare Lal Singh.

By the time India gained independence in 1947, the discourse on regional identity had changed its focus from the social reform movements to the issue of exploitation of Chhattisgarh.

3. Conclusion

The identity of Chhattisgarh has been created and evolved through a complex process that had largely charted its own course. A combination of cultural, historical, social, economic and political factors have contributed to this process. However the key point is that the identity of Chhattisgarh cannot be viewed as separate from the people of Chhattisgarh. It is important to note that the Chhattisgarh identity has been asserted in different forms and has become more pronounced in adverse circumstances manifesting itself especially as symbol of protest against exploitation.

4. References

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