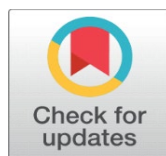
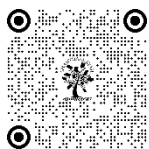


GANDHI AND THE TRIBAL MOVEMENTS IN RAJASTHAN

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ABSTRACT

The paper discussed the Tribal movements in Rajasthan and how Gandhian philosophy had contributed to these movements. The three different phases of tribal movements in Rajasthan were discussed. The early tribal consciousness was focused on the socio-cultural preservation of their culture, whereas the movements in the later phase were more concerned about the preservation of their tribal habitat and resistance against the economic and political exploitations by the Princely States and the British.

Keywords: Gandhi, Tribes, Rajasthan, Tribal Movements, British, Princely States

1. INTRODUCTION

Movements can be defined as an attempt for change, an urge to change Social, Political, economic, and even cultural transitions as well. They are organised, plural, and can develop a strong set of leadership. The ideologies can also play a role in uniting, encouraging, and making people conscious about their role and situation in their lives and society, they are actions and activities of individuals in a silent yet slow manner or can be immediate and even violent.

World History is filled with movements; they remain crucial for shaping the Politics around the world. Ghanshyam Shah in his work 'Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature' defined social movements as non-institutionalized collective political actions that strive for political and or social change. Tribal Movements as the subcategory of social movements in India have adopted very different trajectories, their core issues are related to Rights related to the Forest, preservation of their indigenous culture, and cultural rights.

The paper under submission will discuss the nature and character of Tribal movements in Rajasthan and try to understand how these movements have shaped the core understanding of the Tribal Polity of Rajasthan. Tribes constitute almost 13.48 percent (Census 2011) of the total Rajasthan population, and they are significant culturally and

politically. Rajasthan State is situated in the North-west region of India, it is neighbored by the state of Gujarat and Haryana. The tribes as the original inhabitants of Rajasthan comprise about 12 percent of the total population of the State. they are majorly concentrated in the foothills of the Vindhyas and Aravalli mountain ranges.

The paper will be an evolutionary analysis of Tribal movements in Rajasthan and will also focus on the significance of Gandhi and his ideology on the Tribal movements of Rajasthan.

For Gandhian Philosophy tribes should be approached by non-violence, here non-violence implies an absence of any kind of social domination and political impositions. The fundamental democratic rights of their society should be respected. Any kind of welfare measures for tribal society should be based on their social necessity. He believed that *Sawarij* could not be achieved without the participation of masses from all sections of society. the paper will attempt to understand these principles of Gandhian philosophy in the context of tribal movements in Rajasthan. To assess the following the paper will be divided into three sub-sections:

- 1) The Nature and Context of Early Tribal Consciousness in Rajasthan
- 2) Tribal movements inspired by the Gandhian Philosophy
- 3) Gandhi's understanding of the Tribal Movements in Rajasthan

The detailed discussion on the mentioned themes is as follows.

1) The Nature and Context of Early Tribal Consciousness in Rajasthan

The institutionalisation of Rajasthan State's politics started in the form of *Praja Mandal* movements and *Kisan Sabha* movements. While the *Praja Mandal* movements are more of an urban movement on the other hand the *Kisan Sabha* movement is more rural in their character. These early institutions had created the base for the political structuring of Rajasthan and shaped a very specific regional nature of Rajasthan politics. The *Praja Mandal* was basically the regional institutional structure of Congress and they were backed by the princely states in the resistance against the British, whereas the Kisan Sabha's support base was the dominant caste groups and society of Rajasthan, they defined the caste-based agricultural discourse of pre-independent Rajasthan politics.

The tribal polity was left completely unrepresented by both of them, the specificity of their tribal polity might be the reason, the tribal resistance in Rajasthan was developed by both the British and the princely States. K.S Singh noted that the tribal polity in Rajasthan was not just unique in terms of its demands and method of resistance compared to parallel movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, interestingly there was also significant sub-regional character amongst the various tribal movements within one state (Jain, 1991). For instance, the 19th century Rajasthan's tribal movement emerged in the backdrop of feudalism in the state, the very early movement was developed against various social-evil practices prevalent in the tribal societies.

For instance Rajasthan's southern districts especially Dungarpur, Udaipur, and Banaswara, and Madhya Pradesh's Jabhua region had witnessed the tribal movement against the activities of Christian missionaries in the region, these movements were predominately for the preservation of tribal cultural identity. In a similar fashion bhagat movements in Rajasthan are known as the renaissance in the tribal society of Rajasthan, these movements played a very significant role in spreading the socio-political consciousness amongst the tribes in Rajasthan.

According to Mann, these early socio-cultural tribal movements in Rajasthan are responsible for the process of Sanskritization amongst tribes with increased cultural interaction between tribes and non-tribes. (Mann,1981) Let's briefly discuss some of the major tribal movements of 19th-century Rajasthan.

Mer Agitation (1818 to 1821) the Mer tribes agitated against the encroachment of British Administration in their tribal region. They used to have their own republican regime before the coming of the British, they were mainly settled in the Mewar and Marwar regions and a few of their habitation was also settled in Ajmer Suba as well. Before the coming of the British, they were neither controlled by the Rajputs and Marathas or even Mughals. The tribal economy during phases was not completely agricultural, rather it was a forest-dependent economy.

Bhil Revolts (1818-1860) Bhils also had their autonomous republican mode of self-administration which was secured by their own tribal armies, the Bhil provinces were so developed that they also had their own Tax-collection revenue generation system, and their Taxes were called Rakhwali and Bolai. The Rakhwali means tax collected by Bhils from their neighboring villages while the Bolai means the tax collection from the travelers from their areas. These taxes were very crucial for the economy of Bhil provinces, however, the prohibition on tax collection by the British had a direct effect on the Bhil economy. Hence Bhils from Udaipur province agitated against the British.

Bhil revolts (1861 to 1900) In 1881 the Bhils of Podona and Barapal Villages of Mewar region had agitated which was one of the most significant tribal revolts of the 19th century.

Mina Revolts (1818 to 1860) The Mina Tribe of Udaipur's Jahajpur Pargana had similar reasons for agitation against the British. They were exploited by the new British administration, it was arbitrary and oppressive in its nature. The territories of Minas were more or less autonomous in nature, they had socially and politically independent developed provinces. As cited by Col. Tod in 1823 ruler of Sirohi had a treaty with the British to suppress the Mina revolt in his area (Tod, 1918). The phase of the 19th century witnessed brutal suppression of tribal revolts in Rajasthan.

2) Tribal Movements Inspired by The Gandhian Philosophy

Before 1920 the tribal movements were generally considered ethnic in character, and during this period the tribal movements were not completely exclusive, in many regional upsurges non-tribals had participated in the resistance movements dominated by tribes. This phase is well represented by the Chuar Rebellions (1795-1800), the 1820 uprising of Chero, and the Bhumij and Kol revolts are significant in this regard.

In the context of increased merchant capitalism, these movements defined themselves as the *Mulki Larai* (Singh, Apr., 1985). The central theme of these movements was the agrarian issues along with the religious reforms. For instance, the movements of Kharwar movements of 1877 to 1880, the Munda and Oraon Sardar movements between 1869 to 1895, and the Tana Bhagat movements of 1895 to 1921 are significant in this regard.

Post 1920 movements

The post-1920 tribal movements in Rajasthan reflected more of national politics, in this phase tribal politics should be studied along with the freedom movement in India. the tribal political economy by then had converted into an agrarian economy and had developed a commonness of issues and grievances similar to the non-tribal peasantry. On the other hand, the non-tribal peasantry also had increased their presence in the tribal regions due to the encouragement of the Britishers. The assimilation of the tribal-political economy with the mainstream agrarian economy leads the way for reform movements such as the Bhagat Movements of Bhils.

Gandhi launched the mass movement in 1920 by broadening the base of Congress, hence the tribal and non-tribal movement became significant for strengthening the movement. He said 'No one who hopes to construct swaraj on the foundation of non-violence can afford to neglect even the least of India's sons. Adibasis are too numerous to be accepted among the least'

In 1938, the Haripura session Congress decided to extend the idea of *Purna Swaraj*, but at the same time it had clearly maintained that Congress would only extend 'moral support and sympathy' to the States movements. Wilkinson in his *Rajputana Agency Report* noted for Mewar that due to sedition activities, the State had 'become a hotbed of lawlessness', The movements for land were mainly anti-princely monarch but soon it turned anti-British movement and it spread across adjoining British provinces. (Handa, 1968)

Mahatma Gandhi expressed his views about the Bhil resistance and said that Bhils have been neglected by both the reformers and the state, and if enough support is given to them they can be proud of India. he emphasized the integration of the tribal economy into a self-sufficient rural economy and education for tribal children.

The Eki (eka, aiki) movement under Motilal Tejawat around 1921-1922 is worth notable in this regard. In 1920 Bhils came under the influence of Motilal Tejawat. He emerged as a social reformer and religious leader who attempted to uplift the condition of Bhils. His teaching includes the discouragement of prevalent evil customs in their traditional societies such as polygamy, dowry, patriarchy, liquor consumption, etc.

The word 'Eki' means unity. The core aim of this movement was to build a tribal strong resistance against the British and Princely States. The movement was centered around *Matrikundia* of Chittorgarh. This reason was dominated by the Garasia and Bhils tribes. However, the influence of the Eki movement was visible across major tribal societies of Rajasthan.

The Eki movement was mainly led by Motilal Tejawat and Bijay Singh Pathik, it emerged as a parallel movement to Gandhi's non-cooperation movement. Tejawat was impressed with the Gandhian form of movement, hence he started the non-cooperation movement amongst Bhils in 1921, the core objective of the movement was 'No-Rent' to either British or Princely States. The movement gained massive popularity and emerged as one of the massive and powerful Bhil agitations. To control the growing resistance of Bhils Britishers had established '*Bhumat*' as a new administrative

unit, which was mainly a military-based administrative unit to suppress Bhil movements. Bhils believed that Motilal Tejawat was an embosser of Gandhi, and they had regarded him next to God or as a "holy emissary of Gandhi". Motilal's influence on Bhils reflected in the fact the Bhils had taken oath to obey his core teachings and continue their fights under his leadership. As it follows they stopped payment of land revenues, cesses, and *Begars*. It was the first Tribal movement based on the Gandhian philosophy, and it helped in the unification of scattered various small tribal movements into a larger and stronger tribal resistance.

3) Gandhi's Understanding of the Tribal Movements in Rajasthan

Mahatma Gandhi organised the freedom struggle in the British-governed provinces and he influenced the *satyagrahis* to be mobilised in the Princely state. however, he had adopted the policy of non-interference towards the Princely States between 1920-1937 a part of the Haripura Resolution (1938 and 1948). In the words of John R. Wood 'Gandhi was convinced more than ever of the correctness of his original non-intervention policy' in the Princely States. (JEFFREY, 1978). He wrote in Harijan in the year 1939 (15th July) about his policy towards the Princely States and observe that the States should give freedom to their people so that they can form a public opinion towards the formation of a responsible government of their own.

In Rajasthan, the British government had maintained its dominance over 19 Princely States, out of them the States of Banswara, Dungarpur, Mewar, and Sirohi were largely inhabited by the Bhils and Girassias tribes, whereas the Jahazpur region of Mewar State, Bundi, Kota, Sawai Madhopur (in Jaipur State) and Alwar State was inhabited by the Mina tribes. The tribes were overburdened by oppressive practices such as *Begar* (forced labor), various kinds of Cesses (lag-bags), and heavy land revenues.

The Gandhi's role in the tribal politics has three core dimensions:

- 1) The Policy of Non-intervention in the Princely States (1920-1937)
- 2) From non-intervention to the policy of Intervention (1938 -1948)
- 3) The efforts towards mainstreaming tribal societies

In the early 20th century Gandhi adopted the Policy of Non-intervention in the affairs of the Native princely states, and rather he instead on the unity among the peasants and zamindars, he adopted this policy to strengthen the non-cooperation movement (1920-22). The tribal Ekki movement (1921-22) under the leadership of Motilala Tejawat was also disowned by Gandhi and instead, he sent Manilal Kotharti as his representative to convince Tejawat to suspend the movement. As a result of this non-interventionalist policy the Princely State (especially the state of Rajputana) enforce the sedition Act (1908-1922) to suppress the organisation of any public meeting and basic/political speech and expression. However, an association such as *Rajasthan Sewa Sangh* (1919-1928) was set up in Ajmer for mediation between the peasants and tribals in Rajputana.

The 1938 Haripura Congress Resolution was the turning point for the State politics of Rajasthan. Congress has asserted its aim to have complete independence (*purna swaraj*) which is also the territory of Princely States. This might be because of the growing resistance and political consciousness in the Rajputana States due to the active involvement of Prajamandals or Lok Parishads in the state. the policy of intervention was based on the national Gandhian philosophical core of Satyagraha and non-violence.

In the Dungarpur State, the participation of tribals and non-tribals under the organisational banner of *Dungarpur Sewa Sangh* (a Gandhian organisation) is a significant example of the non-violent struggle of Bhil tribes on Gandhian lines and a shift in their methods of organised resistance. As quoted by Sumit Sarkar and Gyanendra Pandey, the new surge in political awareness and participation in the Princely States includes all segments of the society including Adivasis, women, and students.

Gandhi's association with Thakkar Bapa resulted in various welfare and reconstruction programs among the tribes of India (Sengar, 2001). Because of their joint efforts, Gandhi has included Tribes in his Eighteen Constructive Programme. Bapa believes that the tribes should not be approached by administration or law enforcement agencies, instead, they should be reached out by leaders who understand and are really concerned about the context of tribal welfare and backwardness. They both advocated the socio-economic upliftment of tribes without disturbing their traditional cultural heritage. Gandhi attempted to link *Khadi* initiatives with tribes, which he felt would help tribes generate sustainable employment with self-sufficiency. He termed this as 'Sarvodaya' which was related to skill enhancement amongst tribes by involvement in their regular occupations such as handicrafts, agriculture, animal husbandry, etc.

2. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The role of Gandhi in tribal movements of Rajasthan was twofold: the non-interventionist and the interventionist, his involvement was very strategic and balanced. On the one hand, it lacks any clear ideological stand to support the violent tribal resistance, on the other Gandhi attempted for the constructive preservation and mainstreaming of the tribal societies. He believes that the tribal issues in Rajasthan can be addressed by converting the traditional tribal economy into small/cottage industry models.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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