UNIT 11: PEASANT UPRISINGS IN COLONIAL INDIA

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11.1 Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Identify the major tribal and peasant uprisings that occurred in colonial India and their historical background.
- Explain the economic, social, political, and cultural causes that led to tribal and peasant resistance against colonial rule.
- Analyze the nature and various forms of tribal and peasant movements, including armed rebellions, protests, and non-cooperation.
- Assess the impact of colonial policies on agrarian and tribal communities and their role in shaping resistance movements.
- Evaluate the consequences and historical significance of tribal and peasant uprisings in the development of anti-colonial consciousness in India.

11.2 Introduction

The history of colonial India was marked by numerous uprisings and resistance movements launched by peasants and tribal communities against British rule and its exploitative policies. The introduction of new land revenue systems, commercialization of agriculture, increasing indebtedness, forced cultivation of cash crops, and the encroachment on tribal lands disrupted traditional socio-economic structures and placed immense burdens on rural populations. As a result, various sections of society rose in protest to defend their livelihoods, customary rights, and cultural autonomy.

Tribal uprisings such as the Santhal Rebellion, Munda Ulgulan, and Kol Revolt, as well as peasant movements like the Indigo Revolt, Deccan Riots, and Moplah Rebellion, reflected widespread discontent with colonial administration, landlords, moneylenders, and other agents of exploitation. These movements varied in their nature, leadership, and methods, ranging from armed resistance to organized protests and collective action.

This unit examines the major tribal and peasant uprisings in colonial India, focusing on their causes, forms, characteristics, and consequences. It highlights how these movements challenged colonial authority and contributed to the growth of resistance against British rule, laying important foundations for the broader struggle for India's independence.

11.3 Tribal Uprisings in Colonial India

Tribal uprisings constituted an important form of resistance against British colonial rule in India. Tribal communities, who traditionally depended on forests, land, and shifting cultivation for their livelihood, experienced severe disruptions under colonial administration. The British introduced new land revenue systems, expanded commercial agriculture, enforced restrictive forest laws, and encouraged the penetration of moneylenders, traders, landlords, and missionaries into tribal areas. These changes undermined the economic independence, social organization, and cultural identity of tribal societies.

Faced with increasing exploitation, loss of land, indebtedness, and interference in their customary rights, tribal groups across different regions of India launched a series of revolts during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These movements were often characterized by armed resistance and collective action aimed at restoring traditional rights and autonomy.

The tribal movements were isolated outbursts against local grievances which were primarily economic in nature. The primary target was local vested interests; British official agencies were drawn into these conflicts, because grave questions of law and order were generally involved. So the tribal movements cannot be looked upon as an aspect of the anti-imperialist struggle even though they occasionally had a political overtone. They are important from the historical point of view because they throw light upon the suffering of a section of the people who were not politically vocal and whom the politicians engaged in the struggle for freedom did not consider mobilizing against foreign rule. The tribals comprised of virtually 13% the total population in British India For centuries they lived in isolation and enjoyed local autonomy and led an isolated life and a self-sufficient economy. Shortly after the foundation of British rule their autonomy and self-sufficiency were disturbed, leading to the rise and growth of as many as 70 major tribal uprising in the 19th and early 20th century. These were however confined to the specific tribe and led by local tribal leader.

The British administration gave a severe blow to the tribal economy on account of its policy of land revenue settlement. Increasing official control of forest zones for revenue purposes adversely affected the socio-economic life of the tribes. They lost the opportunities of shifting cultivation. They lost customary rights of using forest land for grazing and using forest timber as fuel. They found themselves exposed to exploitation by forest contractors. Their traditional religions life disintegrated due to the spread of Christianity by European Missionaries. The tribals felt that one of the objectives of the British rule was to convert them to Christianity. This particularly happened in Bihar and the hill areas of Assam. It was under these circumstances that tribal uprising broke out

against the British government. Here we have discussed some major tribal uprisings, which posed a major threat to the Company's rule.

- **SANTHAL UPRISING**

A major tribal resistance movement broke out just before the Revolt of 1857 in the Santhal area of Chollangpur in the present state of Jharkhand which was known as the SanthalUprising. A major cause of their protest was the exploitation of the money lenders and intermediaries of the Zamindars. Confiscation of their properties as well as their lands compelled the Santhals to raise their voice against the British rule. Moreover, forced labour and sexual exploitation of tribal women at the worksites was also a greater concern of the Santhals. Under the leadership of Sidho and Kanhu, they stood up and defied their exploiters. On June 30, 1855 ten thousand Santhalsassembled at *Bhaghadihi*where they announced their war against then British. The latter was compelled to deploy the regular columns of the army to suppress them. The defeat of the British army under Major Burrough by the Santhals at the initial stage was a significant incident of the rebellion. However, the Santhals were finally suppressed by the British army by the end of 1856. To prevent the Santhals from revolting in future, a separate district of SanthalParagana was carved out by the Company.

- **MUNDA UPRISING**

The Munda uprising of 1899-1900 led by Birsa Munda also known as Birsite was the greatest Tribal uprising of the 19th century. This uprising is often referred to as Ulgulum (the great tumult) in the Tribal language. Birsa Munda was a master tactician who raised a Munda Militia in which even Munda women joined. He declared the end of the Company's (British) rule from the Munda areas and announced the establishment of the Mundagiri i.e. the Munda Government. The Munda uprising was the only one in which women rebels fought alongside with their men giving a very strong resistance to the British. To suppress the rebellion, the British had to deploy the regular columns of the army. During the course of this uprising the Mundas attacked the symbols of British authority. However, the rebellious Mundasinspite of their indomitable courage were no match for the British. With the arrest of Birsa Munda and his subsequent death in prison, the Munda uprising collapsed. But it remained a great landmark in the history of Tribal movements.

- **RAMPA REBELLION**

Rampa is a tribal region in the Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh that witnessed a tribal uprising in the 19th century. The tribals of Rampa revolted against the British due to the excessive exploitation by the latter. The British used them as unpaid labourers for the construction of forest roads which hurt the sentiments of the Rampatribals. Their cause was supported by Alluri Sitaram Raju, who was the only non-tribal leader to lead a tribal uprising. He subscribed to the Gandhian ideology but believed that Gandhian methods were unsuited to the cause of the tribals. Consequently, Raju raised a Rampa Militia and waged veritable guerilla warfare against the British. The latter used great man power and spent a huge amount i.e. roughly Rupees15 lakhs to suppress this uprising which ended with the arrest and killing of Sitaram Raju in May 1924. But his supreme sacrifice aroused a Gandhian nationalist, who came forward to espouse the

cause of the tribals. He was Thakkar Bapa, who founded the first All India Tribal Welfare Organisation named All India AdimJati Sangha, the earliest and the most famous tribal organisation that voiced the tribals cause. Thus, it was with the Rampa uprising that the Tribal movement came to be integrated with the larger national movement. The cause of the exploited tribals was supported by the Gandhian nationalists who conceived the idea of tribal welfare.

ACTIVITY 11.1

Make a list of the leaders of different peasant and tribal uprising and mark them on a map of India

- **TANA BHAGAT MOVEMENT**

The TanaBhagat movement emerged among the Mundas and Oraons of Chottanagpur region of Jharkhand in 1920 under the leadership of tribal mendicants known as Bhagat. It is after them that the movement is known as TanaBhagat. There were numerous TanaBhagat movements which began initially as Sanskritization movements to revive the original religion of the Oraons. After the launching of the Non-cooperation movement, the Gandhian nationalists took interest in starting constructive work among the tribals which led to the linking of these movements with the local grievances and ultimately to the national movement.

Let Us Know

Sanskritization Movement: A movement through which a person is assimilated into the caste system of the Hindus, characterized by the use of Sanskrit for religious rituals.

Initially these movements grew up with the appeal of TanaBhagat asking their followers to give up meat and liquor. In the second stage the movement was transformed into a powerful movement for internal reforms and over throw of the British. In 1920 the TanaBhagats came under the fever of nationalism when they took part in the freedom struggle by picketing against liquor shops, holding demonstrations, staging *Satyagrahas* etc. It was during this phase that the nationalist symbols like honouring the poster of Bharatmata bearing the Gandhian cap, honouring the Congress flag etc, became matters of religions faith for the followers of the TanaBhagat movement. It was a unique movement where tribals participated directly to the flow of national movement and the anti-British sentiments were expressed by the tribal through various methods and symbols.

Check Your Progress

1. Fill in the gaps:

a) Sidho and Kanhu were the leaders of the .....Uprising
b) The Munda uprising led by Birsa Munda was known as.....
c) All India Adim Jati Sangha was founded by.....

2. Write True or False:

a) The Rampa is a region of Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh
b) Alluri Sitaram Raju was the only non-tribal leader to lead a tribal uprising.
c) Tana Bhagat movement emerged among Mundas and Santhals of Chottanagpur region.

- **Consequences of the Tribal Movements**

The tribal movements of colonial India had significant social, economic, political, and administrative consequences. Although most of these uprisings were suppressed by the British authorities, they exposed the deep-rooted grievances of tribal communities and compelled the colonial government to reconsider some of its policies. The long-term impact of these movements extended beyond tribal regions and contributed to the broader history of resistance against colonial rule.

- **Recognition of Tribal Grievances**
  One of the most important consequences of tribal uprisings was that they brought the problems of tribal communities to the attention of the colonial administration. The rebellions highlighted issues such as land alienation, excessive taxation, exploitation by moneylenders and traders, forced labour, and restrictions on traditional rights over forests and natural resources. The British government could no longer ignore the dissatisfaction prevailing among tribal populations.
- **Administrative Reforms in Tribal Areas**
  In response to repeated revolts, the colonial government introduced certain administrative reforms in tribal regions. Special administrative arrangements were created in some areas to ensure better control and reduce tensions. These measures aimed to separate tribal areas from the regular administrative system and provide limited protection to tribal communities from exploitation by outsiders.
- **Changes in Land Policies**
  Many tribal uprisings were rooted in the loss of traditional land rights. Consequently, the British administration introduced certain legal measures to regulate land transfers and protect tribal lands. For example, after the Munda Ulgulan, land laws were revised to recognize some customary rights of tribal cultivators. Although these reforms were limited, they acknowledged the importance of tribal claims over land.
- **Modifications in Forest Administration**
  The tribal revolts revealed the adverse impact of colonial forest policies. Tribals depended heavily on forests for cultivation, hunting, grazing, and collection of forest produce. Following several protests, the government made some adjustments in forest regulations and granted limited concessions to tribal communities. However, control over forests largely remained in the hands of the colonial state.

- **Strengthening of Tribal Identity and Unity**
  The uprisings fostered a strong sense of solidarity among tribal groups. Collective participation in resistance movements reinforced tribal identity, cultural traditions, and community consciousness. Leaders such as Birsa Munda became symbols of resistance and pride, inspiring future generations to protect their rights and heritage.
- **Emergence of Tribal Leadership**
  The movements produced charismatic leaders who mobilized tribal communities against oppression. These leaders not only challenged colonial authority but also sought social and cultural reforms within their communities. Their leadership helped transform scattered discontent into organized resistance and left a lasting legacy in tribal history.
- **Inspiration for Future Movements**
  The tribal uprisings demonstrated that organized resistance was possible even against a powerful colonial state. Their struggles inspired later tribal, peasant, and nationalist movements. The spirit of resistance shown by tribal communities became an important source of motivation for broader anti-colonial campaigns in India.
- **Brutal Suppression and Human Loss**
  Most tribal revolts were met with severe repression. The British employed military force to crush the movements, resulting in the deaths of thousands of tribal men and women. Many leaders were arrested, executed, or imprisoned, while villages were destroyed and communities displaced. This repression weakened tribal societies and intensified their economic hardships.
- **Contribution to the Indian Freedom Struggle**
  Although tribal uprisings were generally localized and focused on immediate grievances, they formed an important part of the wider struggle against colonial domination. By challenging British authority and resisting exploitative policies, tribal communities contributed to the growth of anti-colonial consciousness in India. Their sacrifices became an integral part of the history of India's freedom movement.
- **Historical Legacy**
  The tribal movements left a lasting impact on Indian society and politics. They highlighted the need to protect the rights of indigenous communities and influenced post-independence policies relating to tribal welfare, land rights, and forest resources. Today, these movements are remembered as significant expressions of resistance against injustice and exploitation.

  The tribal uprisings of colonial India were more than isolated acts of rebellion; they were powerful assertions of the rights, dignity, and autonomy of tribal communities. While many of these movements were suppressed, they exposed the shortcomings of colonial policies, strengthened tribal identity, inspired future resistance, and contributed significantly to the broader struggle against British rule. Their legacy continues to shape discussions on tribal rights and social justice in contemporary India.

11.4 Peasant uprisings in Colonial India

The grievances of the general masses and lower class people against the British colonial rule were expressed in the Indian subcontinent for the first time in the form of a revolt in 1857. Though historians often call the revolt of 1857 a Sepoy Mutiny or the first struggle of Indians against the British, yet we may say that the foundation stone of this struggle was laid by some of the popular resistance movements pursued by various tribal and peasants groups. They raised their voices against a system which discriminated against them. Peasants and tribals had their own reason to rise together against the colonial rule. To be very honest they were exploited by both the colonial Government and the landlords i.e. Zamindars. Due to the growing demand of land revenue the peasants became poor and were compelled to take loans, as well as to sell of their lands to the landlords. Loss of their lands led them to such an impoverished state that they stood up against the British. On the other hand the tribal resistance against British rule also had some valid cause. After occupying the native land of the tribals, the British administration declared tribal chiefs as Zamindars and not as their kings. Moreover they abolished old taxation and revenue system of the tribals which was a grave concern for the tribals, prompting them to raise slogan against the British rule. Due to the new administrative system introduced by the British government the tribal people start to lose their lands and were reduced to the position of agricultural labourer as well as rack-vented tenants on the land they cultivated. Thus a wave of resentment grew up against the British among the tribal people. Emergence of money lenders, traders, contractors and the protection given to them by the colonial rule was always a matter of conflict between tribals and the British. Tightening of control by the British over forest zones for revenue purposes, religious activities of the Christian Missionaries in their areas, British efforts to suppress certain tribal traditions and practices viz., like human sacrifices etcand British efforts to recruit unpaid tribal labour for menial work are some of the major causes of tribal movements in British India.

LET US KNOW

- **Movement:** A struggle carried out by a group of people who share the same aims or ideas.
- **Rebellion:** A revolt against the authority of an established government or ruler.
- **Uprising:** An insurrection against an established ruler or government.
- **Riot:** A violent public disturbance against the authority by a crowd of people.

In spite of the fact that the Indian peasantry comprised of more than 80% of India's population and were also the worst victims of British rule, the peasant movements in British India, before the launching of the Kishan Sabha movement were very few, and isolated in nature. This was because the British divided the peasantry into various land revenue settlement areas. So, the grievances of the peasants also differ from one region to another. The caste groups among farming community also became an obstacle in the way of an united struggle against British rule. Moreover, after the introduction of the British land revenue settlement the autonomous Indian agrarian institutions like Panchayats and Gram Sabha had disappeared. A new

leadership of the exploiter class, comprising of the Zamindars, moneylenders, Mahaldars etc. emerged. The Indian agrarian life did not have the inner mechanism to unite and raise its voice against exploitation.

We can now begin our discussion by taking up some of the important peasants' movements that occurred against the Company's rule.

- **FAQIR AND SANYASI REBELLION**

The Fakir and Sanyasi uprising led by wandering Muslim Fakirs and Naga Hindu Sanyasi was the earliest agrarian uprising shortly before the annexation of Bengal. As a result of continuous wars and famines, combined with British exploitation of the land and people, Bengal witnessed great economic distress and political unrest in the second half of the 18th century. A large number of uprooted and homeless people joined Hindu or Muslim groups known as Sanyasi or Fakirs who formed large communities and earned their livelihood from begging. The immediate cause of this uprising was the hoarding of food grains by the British leading to famine like condition causing immense miseries to the peasants. By 1772, there was a great Sanyasi rebellion encompassing a wide belt from Rangpur in Dhaka. The British attempted to contain them, especially as they had, by now, taken over the administration of Bengal, but found it a daunting task. Under their brave leader Manju Shah Fakir, the Sanyasis defeated a company of sepoys. This uprising which was confined to Bengal continued for more than three decades. It was after a great deal of effort that this uprising could be suppressed at the close of the 18th century when the Naga Sanyasis joined the third Anglo- Maratha war.

- **INDIGO RIOTS**

Indigo was a commercial crop forced upon the peasantry by the Zamindars and British planters in the Zamindari areas of eastern India. Peasants were kidnapped, illegally confined, women and children were attacked, cattle were lifted and crops were looted, burnt and destroyed if the peasants resisted its cultivation. At one point indigo cultivation was considered to be a symbol of India's slavery. Finally, in 1860 the terribly oppressed indigo peasants launched "Non-Cultivation of indigo" movements. Beginning with the ryots of Govindpur village in Nadia district of Bengal, the indigo strikes rapidly spread to other areas. By the spring of 1860, it totally covered all the indigo districts of Bengal. Factories were attacked, as were policemen and police posts. The peasants even went on a strike, raised funds to fight the courts cases filed against them, and even initiated legal action on their own against the planters. Household servants of the planters were pressurized to leave the service of their employer through social boycott and caste pressures used by the indigo agitators.The indigo peasants got tremendous support from the intelligentsia and the press, as well as from the missionaries of Bengal. Outstanding in this respect was the role of Harish Chandra Mukherjee editor of *HinduPatriot*. Dina BandhuMitra's play 'Neel Darpan' was to gain great fame for vividly portraying the oppression by planters upon indigo farmers.

The ryots themselves showed tremendous courage and initiative as well as cooperation, organization and discipline. There was also complete Hindu, Muslim unity. Not being able to withstand the many sided, united resistance, the planters began to close their factories. The process was also hastened due to the government notification of November 1860 that the ryots could not be compelled to grow indigo in their fields. It

also directed that all disputes should be settled by legal means. The ryots had soon a great victory, through for a limited and immediate cause. This was the first strike of the Indian peasants and it succeeded. However the last echo of the indigo agitation was heard when Gandhi launched Champaran*Satyagraha* in Bihar.

- **PABNA AGRARIAN MOVEMENT**

In the permanent settlement areas of East Bengal (now in Bangladesh),theZamindars used various methods to deprive the ryots of their occupancy rights. The peasants revolted when the Zamindars increased rent through cesses (tax) and tried to prevent them from acquiring the occupancy rights under the Act of 1859through fraudulent measurement, illegal coercion and forced eviction. In May 1874, an Agrarian League was formed. The storm centre of the movement was Pabna, a comparatively prosperous jute-growing district where peasants under the Agrarian League protested against the unjust demands of the Zamindars. The main leader of this Agrarian League was Ishan Chandra Roy, Shambhu Pal and K. Mullah.Under the banner of this league the peasants of a number of districts of East Bengal launched a movement between 1870 and 1885.

The members of the Pabna league raised a litigation expenses fund, held mass meetings to which villagers were called by drumbeats, and organised a non-payments of rent campaign. The main form of resistance was legal and was generally peaceful.ThePabna unrest had two noteworthy features. First it provided a model for the peasants of combination at a time when there was no Kishan Sabha or political party to organize the peasantry. Secondly, it was non-communal. Though the majority of the Zamindars were Hindus and Muslims and formed a large part of the tenantry, yet Hindu peasants fought alongside their Muslims counterparts against the Hindu Zamindars. Many newspapers of the region, like Hindu Patriot and Amrita Bazar Patrika being Pro-landlord (sympathetic to landlords) opposed the peasants' limited demands. They tried to portray it as a communal struggle of Muslim tenants against these Hindu landlords. But two prominent leaders of this movement Ishan Chand Roy and Shambhunath Pal were Hindus. Some other prominent leaders like R.C. Dutt also joined in favour of the tenants. R.C. Dutt also wrote a book "Peasantry of Bengal" in 1874 about this struggle.

The peasant discontent continued till 1885, a decade long struggle resulting in the passing of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. This Act ensured a limited protection to tenants from the worst aspects of Zamindari oppression. But it also gave rise to the powerful *Jotedar* groups. Some of them later turned but to be as exploitative as the Zamindars.

- **DECCAN RIOTS (1874-75)**

In the Ryotwari areas of the Deccan region, especially in the districts of Pune and Ahmednagar the land revenue was very high. Yet, it was periodically enhanced. The revenue demand of the British was required to be paid even when a succession of bad harvest followed. In addition, the cotton boom which had provided some prosperity to the peasants in the early 1860 disappeared overnight with the ending of the American Civil War in 1864 and the resumption of cotton supplies from that continent to Europe. The result was an acute depression in cotton exports from India and a crash in prices.

In these circumstances the peasants had nowhere to turn except money-lenders, must of whom were outsider Marwaris or Gujaratis. The latter exploited this situation to their advantage and obtained mortgage of a very large portion of land against rural loans. The situation became more and more explosive as the peasants were faced with the brutal alternative of mortgaging land or eviction. Some unscrupulous money –lenders even went to the extent of inducing or compelling the debtor peasants tocompromise the honour of their women to get relief from the crushing burden of debts.

The Maratha peasants finally gave vent to their feelings and started social boycott of the moneylenders in Poona and Ahmednagar. They forcibly seized the debt bonds and set them on fire. The riots began in Sirur*taluk* in December 1874 and by September 1875; the Deccan riots affected 33 places in six *taluks*. There was, however, very little actual violence except the forcible seizure of debt bonds led by their traditional headman (Patels). In almost every case the object of the rioters was to obtain and destroy the debt-bonds, decreases etc in the possession of their creditors. Personal violence against them was used only when they refused to hand over these documents.

The uprising was completely crushed by the police assisted by the military, and nearly one thousand peasants were arrested. The Government of India also appointed a commission to inquire into the nature and cause of these riots. The Commission unanimously held that poverty and consequent indebtedness of the cultivators were the real causes of the riots. Following the Commission's recommendations, the Government passed the Agriculturists Relief Act 1879, which imposed restriction on alienation of peasants' lands and on the Operations of the Civil Procedure Code. Consequently, the peasant could not be arrested and jailed for failure to pay debts.

- **REVOLT OF THE RAMOSIS**

The Ramosis of Maharashtra once served in the inferior ranks of police in the Maratha administration. After the fall of the Maratha Kingdom, as a result of the Anglo-Maratha Wars, they reverted back to their lands and had to face considerable distress. Chittur Singh, who revolted in Satara in 1822 as a protest against heavy assessment, gathered the Ramosis under his banner. They played a prominent part in plundering the country and destroying its forts. In 1825 chronic scarcity in the Deccan further distressed them, and they broke into revolt in 1826 under the leadership of Umaji. For three years they scourged the countryside. Ultimately the British Government condoned their crimes gave them land grants and recruited them as hill police.

Later on, Wasudeo Balwant Phadke raised a force of Ramosis. Phadke's feelings were deeply stirred by the devastation caused in western India by the terrible famine of 1876-77. He was convinced that the miseries of India were the consequences of foreign rule. With the support of backward communities like the Ramosis and ordinary, able bodiedpeasants of Maharashtra villages, Phadke organised social banditry or political dacoities on a significant scale. He was arrested in 1880 and died three years later (1883) in prison. His band of Ramosis remained active till 1887.

- **MOPLAH UPRISING**

In the Malabar region, the discontent of the Muslim Moplah peasants acquired a religious flavour, giving a Hindu-Muslim angle to the expression of anti-landlord and anti-foreign discontent. Hindu upper caste Namboodiri and Nairjenmis position had been reestablished even vastly enhanced by the British tightening their grip over the Muslim Moplah peasantry. Retaliation and revolt become virtually endemic in many *talukas* of South Malabar and had a messianic tinge. Twenty-two revolts were recorded between 1836 and 1854; more uprisings took place in 1882-85 and again in 1896. The Moplahs were organised by the Congress and Khilafatist during the Non-Cooperation phase of India's freedom struggle. A tenant's rights agitation, developing in Malabar from 1916 was taken up by the Khilafat movement, after the ManjheriConference of April, 1920. Promises of an imminent egalitarian Muslim State were made. The arrest of established Congress and Khilafat leaders like K. Mahadevan Nair, Gopala Menon, Yakub Hasan and P. MoideenKoya in February 1921 left the field clean for radical preachers.

On August 20, 1921, a police raid on Tiruraingadi Mosque in search of rebels sparked off a major rebellion with widespread attacks on police stations. However, public offices, communications and houses of landlords and poor Hindus were spared. The situation however changed when the British declared martial law. The Hindus, either under pressure or voluntarily, took a pro-authorities stance. The Moplahs now became anti-Hindu. They attacked and forcibly converted or murdered Hindus. What started as largely an anti-government and anti-landlord affair thus acquired strong communal overtones.

The Congress had already distanced itself from the Moplahs for their use of violence. In the British reprisals, by December 1921 unofficially over 10,000 Moplahs were killed and over 50,000 had either surrendered or were captured and the back of the revolt was broken.

- **CHAMPARAN AND KHEDA SATYAGRAHA**

The cultivators of Champaran district in Bihar in the 19th century had been forced by European planters to cultivate indigo on 3/20th of their holding-known as *tinkathia* system. With the declining market for indigo in the face of synthetic dyes, the planters were now willing to release the farmers from their irksome crop but only by recurring enhancements in rent and other illegal dues. Persuaded by a local man Rajkumar Shukla, in 1917, Mahatma Gandhi offered civil disobedience and refused to leave the district when ordered. The British Government capitulated and Gandhiji ordered and inquiry which involved extensive touring and recording statements of thousands of peasants by men like J.B.Kriplani and Rajendra Prasad. The result was the abolition of the *tinkathia* system and compensation to the peasants for illegal increase in their dues.

Gandhiji's intervention proved much more of a permanent success at Kheda district of Gujarat, where he went to alleviate the distress of the KunbiPatidar peasants due to crop failure. Their appeals for remission of land revenue were being ignored by the Government. With the help of the leaders like IndulalYajnik and Vallabhbhai Patel, Gandhiji toured the district advising the peasants to stand firm and withhold payment of

revenue. After a hard struggle, the Government issued secret orders directing that revenue should be recovered only from those peasants who could pay and Gandhiji withdrew the movement in 1918.

Check Your Progress

3. Match the following leaders with the movements they were connected with:

	Leaders	**Movements**
1)	Ishan Chandra Roy	a) Revolt of the Ramosis
2)	Chittur Singh	b) Champaran Satyagraha
3)	Rajkumar Shukla	c) Pabna Agrarian Movement

4. Choose the correct answer.

i. Indigo was a commercial crop that was cultivated in eastern India/Western India/Southern India.

ii. Neel Darpan was written by Harish Mukharjee / Dina Bandhu Mitra / Bankimchandra Chattarjee.

iii. The Agricultural Relief Act was passed by the government in 1875/1879/1882

- **Consequences of Peasant Uprisings in Colonial India**

  Peasant uprisings in colonial India emerged as responses to oppressive land revenue policies, exploitation by landlords and moneylenders, forced cultivation of cash crops, and the economic hardships imposed by British colonial rule. Although most of these movements were local in character and often suppressed, they had far-reaching consequences for Indian society, colonial administration, and the growth of anti-colonial consciousness.

- Exposure of Agrarian Problems

  The peasant movements brought to light the severe hardships faced by cultivators under colonial rule. Issues such as excessive land revenue demands, indebtedness, eviction from land, and exploitation by zamindars and moneylenders became matters of public concern. The uprisings forced the colonial government to acknowledge the growing agrarian crisis.

- Reforms in Revenue and Agrarian Policies

  Several peasant agitations compelled the British administration to introduce reforms in land revenue and tenancy laws. For example, the Indigo Revolt led to the appointment of the Indigo Commission, which recommended measures against the coercive practices of European planters. Similarly, the Deccan Riots prompted the enactment of the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879 to provide protection to indebted peasants.

- Limitation of Landlord and Moneylender Exploitation

  The uprisings highlighted the oppressive role of landlords, planters, and moneylenders in rural society. As a result, certain legal measures were introduced to regulate moneylending practices and protect tenants from arbitrary eviction. Though these reforms were often limited, they represented a recognition of peasant grievances.

- Growth of Peasant Consciousness

  Peasant movements fostered a sense of collective identity and awareness among cultivators. Through participation in protests and resistance, peasants became increasingly conscious of their rights and the need for organized action against exploitation. This development laid the foundation for later agrarian and political movements.

- Emergence of Organized Rural Resistance

  Many peasant uprisings demonstrated the ability of rural communities to organize themselves and challenge powerful colonial institutions. Collective actions such as refusal to pay taxes, boycotts, demonstrations, and mass protests became important methods of resistance and were later adopted by nationalist movements.

- Influence on the Nationalist Movement

  The experiences of peasant struggles influenced the Indian nationalist movement. Leaders of the freedom struggle recognized the importance of agrarian issues and sought to mobilize peasants against colonial rule. Movements such as the Champaran Satyagraha, Kheda Satyagraha, and Bardoli Satyagraha drew inspiration from earlier peasant resistance and linked agrarian demands with the broader struggle for independence.

- Development of Peasant Organizations

  The growing awareness generated by peasant uprisings eventually led to the formation of organized peasant associations and unions. Organizations such as the All India Kisan Sabha worked to articulate peasant demands and advocate for agrarian reforms at regional and national levels.

- Strengthening Anti-Colonial Sentiment

  Although many peasant movements initially focused on local grievances, they gradually contributed to the spread of anti-colonial sentiment. Peasants increasingly came to view colonial policies as the root cause of their economic difficulties, thereby strengthening resistance to British rule.

- Social and Political Awakening

  The uprisings encouraged political participation among rural populations. Peasants became active participants in public life, developing greater awareness of social justice, economic rights, and political change. This awakening played a significant role in democratizing Indian politics.

- Long-Term Impact on Independent India

  The legacy of peasant movements continued after independence. Their demands influenced post-independence land reforms, tenancy legislation, abolition of the zamindari system, and policies aimed at improving the condition of cultivators. The struggles of colonial-era peasants thus shaped the trajectory of agrarian development in modern India.

11.5 Let Us Sum Up

After going through this unit, you have learnt-

- The tribal and peasant uprisings of colonial India were important expressions of resistance against British rule and the exploitative systems introduced by the colonial state. Colonial land revenue policies, commercialization of agriculture, indebtedness, land alienation, and interference in traditional rights created widespread discontent among rural and tribal communities. In response, numerous revolts emerged across different regions of India, reflecting the determination of these communities to protect their livelihoods, resources, and cultural identity.
- Tribal movements such as the Kol Rebellion, Santhal Rebellion, Bhil Revolts, and the Munda Ulgulan were primarily directed against the loss of land, restrictions on forest rights, and the intrusion of outsiders into tribal areas. Similarly, peasant uprisings such as the Indigo Revolt, Pabna Movement, Deccan Riots, and Moplah Rebellion arose from agrarian exploitation, oppressive taxation, and the activities of landlords, moneylenders, and European planters.
- Although most of these movements were localized and were often suppressed by the colonial authorities, they exposed the shortcomings of British policies and compelled the government to introduce certain administrative and legal reforms. These struggles also fostered collective consciousness, strengthened community solidarity, and encouraged organized resistance against oppression.
- Most importantly, tribal and peasant uprisings contributed to the growth of anti-colonial sentiment and laid the groundwork for broader nationalist movements. They demonstrated that ordinary cultivators and tribal communities were active participants in India's struggle against colonial domination. Their legacy continues to be remembered as an important chapter in the history of social justice, popular resistance, and the Indian freedom movement.

11.6 Further Reading

- Guha, Ranajit. Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Hardiman, David. The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Kumar, Dharma. The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. II: c. 1757–1970. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Desai, A. R. Peasant Struggles in India. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979.

11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

Answer no. 1:

(a) Santhal

(b) Munda Uprising

(c) Thakkar

Answer no. 2:

(a) True

(b) True

(c) False

Answer no. 3:

(i) - (c)

(ii) - (a)

(iii) - (b)

Answer no. 4:

(a) Eastern India

(b) Dina Bandhu Mitra

(c) 1879

11.8 Model Questions

A) Very Short Questions

Q.1: What were the main causes of tribal uprisings in colonial India?

Q.2: Who led the Munda Ulgulan movement?

Q.3: In which year did the Santhal Rebellion take place?

Q.4: What was the primary objective of the Indigo Revolt?

Q.5: How did peasant uprisings contribute to the growth of anti-colonial consciousness in India?

B) Short Questions

Q.1: Discuss the major causes responsible for the tribal uprisings in colonial India.
Q.2: Explain the nature and characteristics of tribal resistance movements against British rule.
Q.3: Examine the causes and significance of the Indigo Revolt in colonial India.
Q.4: Describe the impact of colonial land revenue policies on the condition of peasants.
Q.5: Analyze the consequences of tribal and peasant uprisings for the Indian nationalist movement.

C) Long Questions

Q.1: Discuss the impact of British colonial policies on tribal societies and explain how these policies led to various tribal uprisings in India.
Q.2: Examine the major tribal rebellions of colonial India and assess their significance in the history of resistance against British rule.
Q.3: Analyze the socio-economic conditions of peasants under colonial rule and evaluate the factors that contributed to the emergence of peasant uprisings.
Q.4: Compare and contrast tribal and peasant movements in colonial India with reference to their causes, leadership, methods, and objectives.
Q.5: Critically evaluate the role of tribal and peasant uprisings in shaping anti-colonial consciousness and contributing to the Indian freedom struggle.