



A study of the changing trend of social movements in Bihar (1800-1947 and beyond)

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Abstract : *Social movement primarily takes the form of non-institutionalized collective political action which strives for political and social change. While Bihar has witnessed many such movements over the centuries, it is only recently that scholars have begun to study them in depth.*

This study is categorized into three kinds of movements i.e., tribal, peasant and women's movements. The present study has been undertaken to understand the changing trend of the social movements. The study of these movements is based on primary sources like interviews, online surveys, and random individual questionnaire surveys and colonial reports. Secondary sources like books and websites have been used.

In the tribal section, findings shed light on the tribal movement, issues, leadership, organization of colonial and post colonial period.

In the peasant section, findings shed light on the movements, issues, ideologies and leadership of colonial and post-colonial period.

In the women's section, findings shed light on movements, issues, and reforms of colonial and post colonial period.

Keywords : *Social movement, tribal, peasant, women, colonial period, post-colonial period.*

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Introduction :

Social movements are an integral part of India's history and emphatically that of Bihar's. Due to the shifting focus of historians from the history of the elite to that of the subaltern, social movement of the different classes has taken on a new importance. In the words of Sumit Sarkar, it is a 'history from below'. Modern Bihar is shaped by the social movements of the masses which took place during the colonial period. These social movements were largely mass movements of the downtrodden, particularly those of peasants, tribal communities and women. These movements though functioned differently from one another.

Our study is limited to Bihar from the period 1800 to 1947. In this context, the expression 'Bihar' includes

North and South Bihar as well as Chhotanagpur plateau, which, though forming part of the State of Bihar, has also been intermittently witnessing sub-national movement since the early days of the British rule.

The period 1800 to 1947 has deliberately been chosen, because it not only reflects the prolonged tenacity of struggling peasant, tribes and women sections in Bihar, but also brackets important methodological and ideological variations surfacing in the chequered history of their struggle, a development poignantly manifested in the transformation of the nature of social movement from spontaneity to organization.

We have studied three kinds of social movements - tribals', peasants' and women's movement.

Purpose :

Our attempt is to provide a panoramic view of the process of continuity and change in the struggles in which peasants, tribals, and women of Bihar participated or led during the colonial and post colonial period starting from 1800 A.D. till independence onwards.

This study is an attempt to provide a historical perspective of the peasants', tribals', and women's movement in Bihar during the aforementioned period, done through a comparative analysis of the colonial and post-colonial period.

Objectives :

- To understand the changing direction and demands of social movements of tribal natives.
- To understand changing pattern of the peasant movements along with their issues and demands.
- To understand the change in the pattern of women's involvement in social movements.

Hypotheses :

- The tribal social movements of the post-colonial period were more fragmented in nature than the colonial ones.
- Along with the changing trend of the peasant movements, their issues and demands also changed.

- Women's movements of colonial period were led by men but women's movements of post-colonial period are being headed by women themselves.

Methodology:

The project is based on historical and content analysis.

Information based on secondary data-books, journals, internet websites, newspaper cuttings.

Information based on primary data- colonial reports, interviews, online and offline surveys. The data collected from respondents are expressed in percentage in pie charts for the surveys.

The responses to interview questions reflect the understanding of the experts on the topic concerned.

Limitations of the study:

- Limited number of respondents to surveys -
Questionnaire 1 - 50 (purposive random questionnaire from the area of Khunti, Ranchi; for authentic Adivasis' perception).
Questionnaire 2 - 50 (purposive random questionnaire, online).
Questionnaire 3 - 60 (purposive random questionnaire, online).
- Interviews are also limited to three intellectuals only.
- Limited pages and words of the research project and paper.
- Lack of resources and time.

Tribal movements:

The ethnic minority and the tribals of the Chhotanagpur region were the first victims of colonization. This has been called internal colonization. The three major rebellions between the period 1820s-1947 which have been studied in this paper are – Kol rebellion (1830-31), Santhal rebellion (1857-58), and Munda uprising (1895-1900).

These rebellions had similar issues- encroachment upon their lands by Britishers and Indian Zamindars, different forms of land taxes, increased interference in their community (disregarding their culture) and exploitation by Indian *Mahajans*, *Zamindars*, merchants, and police of all religions who were non-*adivasis*.

The leaderships were militant and they used guerrilla warfare to defeat their enemies— which were all the outsiders (*dikus*). The Kols worked as a collective whole with their natural tribal leaders leading them to assert tribal authority. The Santhals were led by four brothers Sidhu, Kahnu, Chand and Bhairav. The Mundas were led by Birsa Munda.

The Jharkhand movement, which began in the 1920s among the tribes of Chhotanagpur and Orissa, was the longest autonomy movement where the inter-tribal cooperation was seen. In its course, the Jharkhand movement was led by many political organizations with their overarching agenda of separate statehood for Jharkhand away from Bihar.

In chronological order the political parties are given-

- A. Chhotanagpur Improvement Society (Chhotanagpur Unnati Samaj, 1920)
- B. Adivasi Mahasabha (1938)
- C. Jharkhand Party (1950)
- D. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM, 1973)

During the 1920s, the major agenda of the organizations were to unite the scattered tribal revolts into an organized movement against the British rule.

The major issues of the Adivasis was to cure their economic, social, and political backwardness and to safeguard the identity of Adivasis of Chhotanagpur. Chhotanagpur Unnati Samaj placed a demand before the Simon Commission in 1928 to form a sub-state of Chhotanagpur joined either to Bengal or Orissa. But the attempt failed due to inter-ethnic gap.

During the 1930s, industrialization and urbanization began, leading to an influx of outsiders – *dikus* – into the area. To bring unity among the people, Adivasi Mahasabha changed the concept of *Dikus* from all outsiders to only those Northern Biharis who send their earnings outside to their home. Now, the working class of non-Adivasis were also counted amongst the Jharkhandi people.

With the change in the concept, ethnicity lost its exclusive value and regionalism started. The Jharkhand Party had electoral wins in 1952 and 1957. In 1954, the Jharkhand Party submitted a memorandum to the State Reorganization Commission (SRC), demanding the

separate statehood for Jharkhand within the national and constitutional framework of Sovereign and Democratic Republic of India. However, this demand was rejected on the grounds, including the absence of viable language link.

From 1960s onwards, under the influence of Naxalites, radicalization and Marxist ideology takes roots. Agrarian issues are taken up as the main agenda and a pan-ethnic identity of the poor peasants of Jharkhand develops. The demand for statehood along with reservation for the peasants and freedom from all class exploitation are demanded by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha.

After the 1980s, rather than mass mobilization party politics takes hold of the movement. But the united front of the people—Adivasis or non-Adivasis – for separate Jharkhand stays, however, underutilized. Amidst all these, the Jharkhand Bill by the underutilized Indian Parliament was passed on 2nd August 2000.

The Naxal revolt began in 1967 in Naxalbari, where a population of 42,000 from 60 odd villages rose in an armed revolt. The majority were tribals – Santhal, Oraons, Mundas, and Rajbanshis. Other participants included poor peasants, landless labourers and students. Out of which the tribal community was the largest collectively, with the Santhals making up the largest numbers of participants. So, the leadership remained with them.

The major issues for the Naxal revolt are the exploitation of the participants at the hands of moneylenders and landowners. The reason for students participation was rampant unemployment. In central Bihar also the Naxal revolt takes hold among the poor peasants, landless labourers and Dalits against the economic exploitation by moneylenders.

The ideals of Naxalites was Communism but they were influenced by Mao Tse-Tung. Their methodology was guerrilla war as well. They found their political backing in the CPI (Communist Party of India).

Our first objective is to understand the changing trend of social movements of tribal natives. Through the interview taken from Dulal Kumar Mahto (social worker, Gunddu, Ranchi), the selected questions have been taken to summaries this objective.

Question 1 - How different was the Jharkhand movement (the longest autonomy movement) from those of colonial tribal movements ?

Answer - The major agenda of the colonial tribal movement was freedom from the outsiders including the Indian *Sahukars*. They exploited the Adivasis using the communication gap also. While the Jharkhand movement was ongoing for development within the independent India through a separate state. The area of Chhotanagpur was different from northern Bihar - culturally and geographically, with the Adivasis in majority. Also the revenue was generated 70% from this area due to being rich in natural resources but only about 20% was spent on its welfare; all this basis were the demands for the separate statehood of Jharkhand which was achieved through the parliamentary method of electoral politics.

Question 2 - In the post-colonial movements, were the Adivasis united as one in their demand for a separate Jharkhand, or did the outsiders (*dikus*) benefited more?

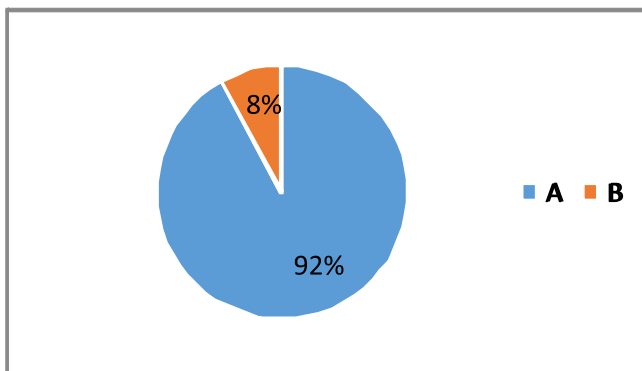
Answer - All the various tribal communities and the organizations were united in their demand for separate Jharkhand. Talking about Naxals, the adivasis of various communities were also united in the militant activities. A regional identity has developed in course of time which included all the tribals as well as the regional workers/labourers who were non-*adivasis*. It was a united front.

From objective survey questionnaire 1, the selected question has been shown along with its graph:

Question - Do you believe that the Jharkhand movement and the Naxal revolt were more united which tried to include all Adivasis, than those of the pre-independence ones such as the Kol and Santhal rebellions.

A. Yes

B. No



Number of total respondents - 50

Peasants movement :

The agrarian movement which are done by the poor agricultural laborers and marginal farmers are known as peasant movements. Bihar remained the scene of intermittent peasant struggle throughout the 19th century and the first decade of the present century. Since 1830, there had been times of awareness on the tenants' part of their right vis-a-vis European Indigo planters. However, peasant's rose in massive protest in 1967 - 68 in Darbhanga, Muzzafarpur, and Champaran district. Of all the areas of resistance, Champaran witnessed the most sustained and sometimes even violent upsurge. Owing to their growing consciousness, the tenants of the 19th century Bihar could effectively be mobilized, and force of their struggle bore fruit as the rate of indigo was raised from rupees 8 or 9 per Bigha to rupees 12 per Bigha.

The movement of Indigo peasants again started in 1907 in Champaran at continued in 1917 when Mahatma Gandhi came to lead the famous Champaran Satayagraha.

The peasant movement led by Swami Vidyanand (1919-20) and later on dwells upon how the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (1929) which started reformative frame, gradually developed into a powerful mass organization under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati.

In this long chain of continuous agrarian agitations, the most important agitation during 1930s was 'The Sathi Land agitation'. It underlined the nexus between the bureaucrats and politicians, they had class and caste - ties and came from the same social milieu.

The main issues of the peasant movement of colonial period were - Unequal distribution of land, poor wages, forced labour, indigo cultivation, poor irrigation facilities etc.

In the post colonial phase the prevailing tension and violence, mounting protests and the dissent in contemporary Bihar, especially in the context of radical talk about the need for agrarian reforms with little or no action in the field of implementation coupled with a quantitative change in the belief system of the masses and sense of grievances and deprivation which is leading to an attitude of defiance against the existing system.

Bhoodan Movement was a movement initiated by Vinoba Bhave in 1961. this movement focused on the distribution of land to the landless labourers from wealthy land owners.

In 1962, Sone Canal agitation began which continued up to 1962 to 63 was against the government decision to enhance irrigation rates.

The peasants now realized that the legislative enactments could not head them much. The cult of armed resistance, as advocated by city-bred and well educated Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideologues and activists was accepted by this class for asserting their rights. Thus, the peasant movement by 1975 had a new shape; the landless laborers turned into militants popular known as Naxalites.

There is also Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini carried struggle against the *Mahant* of Bodhgaya in 1978. Ultimately, the movement was proved successful.

The main issues of the post-colonial peasant movement were almost same with that of colonial period, only the problem of indigo cultivation has not remained an issue for peasants of post-colonial period. Apart from indigo cultivation, the issues of irrigation facilities, transportation, poor wages, unequal distribution of land etc. still exists.

Movements of 19th century were just the aggression of peasants against the planters without any ideology. But in the 20th century two ideologies appeared -

1. Gandhian ideology
2. Communist ideology

Gandhian ideology is based on satyagraha with ultimate value-goal of truth and nonviolence, where as, communist ideology focuses on class struggle and believes in violence.

There was a strong and well organized leadership in the movements of colonial period, where as in post-colonial period the same is missing. For example - Champaran satyagraha of 1917 was proved successful due to the able guidance of the leaders like Gandhiji, Raj Kumar Sukla, Rajendra Prasad etc. On the other hand, if we take the example of Naxalite movement in post-colonial period, we notice clearly that an able leadership was missing, hence ultimately it fizzled out. In contemporary times movements are taking place at local level which do not find a mention in any of the books and their issues are still similar as colonial and post-colonial period.

An excerpt from an interview on peasant movements with **Dr. Ashok Kumar Ranjan, Archivist (record officer), Bihar Archives**, has been given below.

Question 3 - Are there any differences between the issues of the colonial and the post-colonial peasant movements? Justify your answer.

Answer - No, there are no difference between the issues of the colonial and the post-colonial period. In the colonial period, peasants were not given equal share of land and satisfactory earnings and the same situation in the post-colonial period exists. Even in contemporary times, peasants are driven to commit suicide due to the same issues.

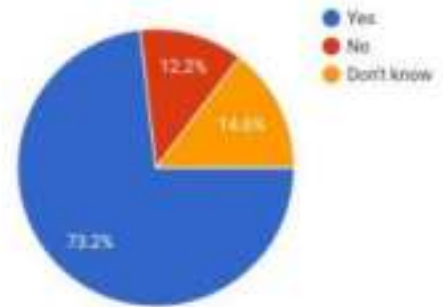
Question 4 - During which period political consciousness is visible in peasant movement - colonial or post colonial peiod. Justify your answer.

Answer - In post-colonial period political consciousness is visible in peasants. Now, they are discussing their issues at political arena which less or more proved effective for them.

From the objective survey questionnaire 2 (online), selected questions are shown below along with their graphs; number of respondents 50.

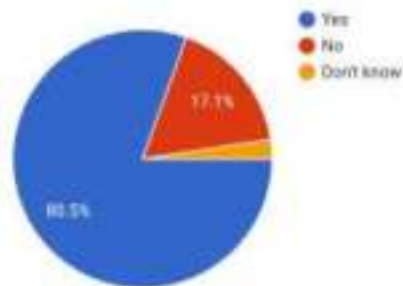
Question - Are the issues and demands of the peasant movements of the post-colonial period more or less the same with those of the colonial period

- A. Yes B. No C. I don't know



Question - The overall condition of peasants in the post-colonial period remained more or less similar as that of the colonial period. Do you agree with this statement?

- A. Yes B. No C. I don't know



Women's movement :

The positions of women centers around two extremes. There is a strand of thought which holds that they enjoy a very high status, and on the opposite extreme we have the view that their situation is very hard. Women's movement consist of a set of political campaigns that held to fight for the issues related with women and bring reforms.

During the ancient times although women were dependent and got protection from men, they enjoyed , in theory as well as practice, a considerable extent, an honourable status in society. A change in the status of women can be traced as a sequel to the advent of Muslim rule in India. It stamped the women with the stigma of mental deficiency and created in then a derogatory sense of inferiority complex. The sati, puradh, infanticide among the female children, early marriage, social condemnation of widows had become fairly common, at least among the Hindus. When the British arrived, a new social ideology, a new culture tradition, a new philosophical outlook and a new religious system was initiated in the complex web of existing social order.

The social reform movement initiated in the nineteenth century laid emphasis on the improvement of women's status through education, restriction on child marriage, improvement in the condition of the widows and provision of property rights etc.

The degraded position of Women was first taken into account through Brahma samaj Movement initiated by Raja Rammohan Roy in the third decade of the 19th century. He tried to stop Sati system and raised voice for girl's education.

Arya samaj movement initiated by Dayanand Saraswati by the end of the 19th century focused on the equality of genders and raised voice against evil custom like infant marriage.

Women also participated in freedom movements with the firm determination.

Non-cooperation movement started in 1921 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in which women from Bihar likw Sarla Devi, Urmila Devi, Savitri Devi etc. played significant role.

Civil disobedience movement initiated by Gandhi ji in 1930 was also welcomed by women of Bihar in form of their participation In 1941, Gandhiji launched satyagrah

movement. Bihar women like- Priyamwada Devi, Janti Devi etc participated and even got arrested.

In 1942 quit India movement was started by Gandhi ji in which Tara Rani srivastava along with her husband marched to host the flag before Siwan police station on 9th Aug 1942.

In Post Colonial period in spite of the developments in the various sectors of the system the condition of the women is not that satisfactory. Their issues are poverty, problem of employment, Problem of marriage, system of dowry, domestic violence and finally bride burning demonstrate the hollowness of the society.

Bodhgaya movement of 1978 emerged under the leadership of Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini was encouraged by women in form of their participation against the Math officials.

The Nirmal Gram movement(Patna 16 March 2006) was led by Bihari Women for installing hygenic toilets.

#Metoo and Triple talaq movement are example of some other movement in which Bihar women have shown active participation.

The Women living in urban areas get more freedom but the situation in rural area is also changing fast and Women are getting conscious of their rights.

An excerpt from an interview on the women's movements with **Dr. Sarada Saran, Archivist, Bihar State Archives.**

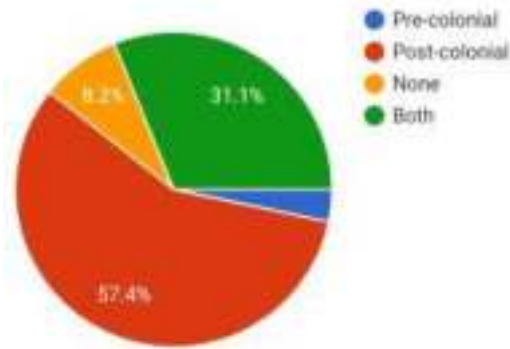
Question 5 - In the colonial period issues regarding women were raised by men but in the post-colonial period women are themselves raising their issues. Do you agree with this statement? Justify?

Answer - Yes, I agree with this statement. In the colonial period the organizations which worked for the upliftment of women, like Brahma Samaj, were generally headed by men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidysagar, etc. But after independence, women are establishing their own organizations to work for their own development.

From the objective questionnaire 3 (online) the selected questions and their data have been shown; total number of respondents - 60.

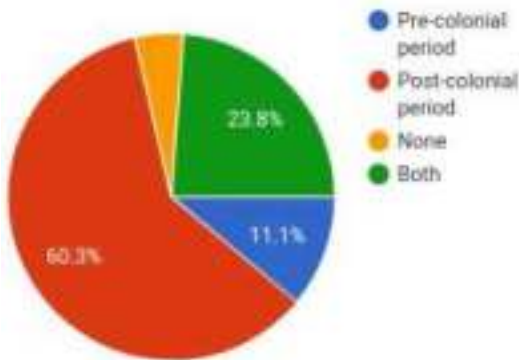
Question - Women have shown active participation towards the government policies for their upliftment in.

A. Colonial period B. Post-colonial period C. None D. Both



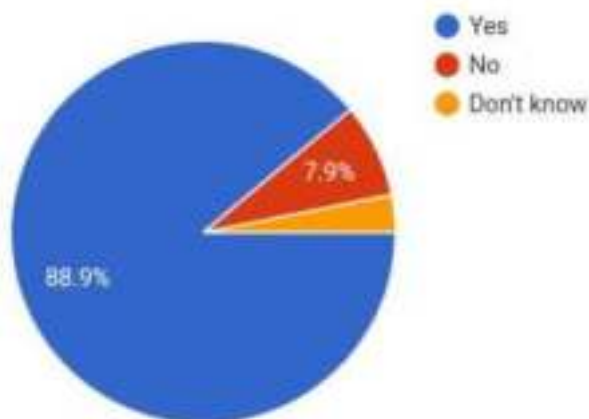
Question - Participation of women in political field was more in

A. Colonial period B. Post- colonial period
C. None D. Both



Question - Would you agree that women's participation in the field of their own has raised their welfare compared to the colonial time?

A. Yes B. No C. Don't know



Conclusion:

Our first hypothesis - "The tribal social movements of the post-colonial period were more fragmented in nature than the colonial ones". Has been proven wrong.

The tribal movements are now being led by politically inclined leaders rather than those who appealed to the religious sentiments of the people. The participation and method have also changed from guerrilla warfare to political electoral competition. Although Naxals had the ideology of violence, they are also in the elections. Thus the unity of the post-colonial tribal movements is stronger.

Our second hypothesis - "Along with the changing trend of the peasant movements, their issues and demands have also been changed". Has been proven wrong.

The peasant movements appeared with two ideologies in the early 20th century onwards i.e., Gandhian and Communist ideologies. Political consciousness also developed among peasants after independence. Leadership of the post-colonial movements seems less organized than in the colonial period. The movements still have overall the same issues.

Our third hypothesis "Women's movements of the colonial period were led by men but women's movement of the post-colonial period are being headed by women themselves", has been proven right.

The most important changing trend in womens movements is that women are politically conscious and aware in comparison to the women of the colonial period. As such, the leadership has been taken by them on women's issues.

Suggestion:

- The government should provide better education, schemes for health and job assurance to the Adivasi youth.
- The ethical identity of individual tribes should be preserved.
- Peasants must establish organizations at village level and block level and discuss on various issues of farming.
- The farm schools must be opened in each block in our country in order to spread innovative and knowledgeable methods.

- Capturing and conserving every drop of rain water. For this, farmers should adopt either sprinklers or drop irrigation system.
- Women should participate in self-help groups, it will help them economically to some extent
- Importance of education should be spread among women section.

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