



Mains Practice Question

Q. Trace the evolution of tribal and peasant movements in colonial India between 1850 and 1947. Evaluate their role in shaping nationalist politics. (150 words)

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Approach:

- Introduce the answer by briefing about India's tribal and peasant movements between 1850 and 1947.
- Highlight the Evolution of Tribal and Peasant Movements with key developments
- Delve into the Role of these movements in Shaping Nationalist Politics
- Conclude with a relevant quote.

Introduction:

Between 1850 and 1947, **India's tribal and peasant communities waged persistent struggles against colonial domination.** Their resistance went beyond the demand for political freedom, centering on the protection of 'Jal, Jangal, Jameen' (water, forests, and land), which were integral not only to their survival and livelihood but also to their cultural identity and social cohesion.

Body

Evolution of Tribal and Peasant Movements (1850-1947)

- **Phase I: Early Uprisings (1850-1900)**
 - This period was characterized by spontaneous and localized uprisings, primarily driven by immediate grievances against colonial policies.
 - **Tribal Movements:** Early tribal movements, such as the Santhal Hool (1855-56) and the **Munda Ulgulan (1899-1900)** led by Birsa Munda, were direct responses to the **encroachment of moneylenders, landlords (dikus), and the colonial state's Forest Acts.**
 - The movements were primarily focused on regaining lost autonomy and land rights.
 - **Peasant Movements:** Peasant uprisings like the **Deccan Riots (1875)** and the **Pabna Agrarian League (1873-76)** were primarily against high rents, usurious interest rates, and the eviction of tenants.
 - These movements, though localized, showed a growing awareness of the exploitative nature of the colonial land revenue system and its intermediaries.
- **Phase II: Consolidation and Ideological Shift (1900-1930)**
 - As the 20th century began, the movements started to become more organized, moving beyond purely spontaneous resistance.
 - **Rise of Kisan Sabhas:** The formation of Kisan Sabhas and other peasant organizations, particularly in regions like Awadh and Bihar, marked a shift towards a more structured form of protest.
 - Leaders like **Baba Ramchandra organized tenants against high rents and forced labor (begar).**

- **Tribal Integration:** While tribal movements continued to fight for their distinct identities, there was an increasing realization of their shared struggle with the broader peasantry.
 - The **Rampa Rebellion (1922) led by Alluri Sitarama Raju**, for instance, combined tribal grievances with a broader anti-British agenda, drawing inspiration from **Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement**.
- **Phase III: Integration with National Movement (1930-1947)**
 - This final phase saw the direct integration of peasant and tribal movements with the mainstream nationalist struggle.
 - The **Bardoli Satyagraha (1928) led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel**, and **Nagpur Jungle Satyagraha of 1930** are prime examples of this phase.

Role in Shaping Nationalist Politics

- **Broadening the Social Base:** They helped to transform the nationalist movement from an elite-driven struggle to a mass movement, with participation from diverse social strata.
- **Articulating a Deeper Anti-Imperialism:** While the early nationalist movement often focused on constitutional reforms, the peasant and tribal movements highlighted the economic exploitation inherent in colonial rule.
 - This gave the nationalist struggle a more profound anti-imperialist and anti-feudal character.
- **Influencing Nationalist Programs:** The constant pressure from these movements forced the Indian National Congress to adopt more radical agrarian agendas.
 - The Karachi Resolution (1931), which called for a living wage, free primary education, and a reduction in land revenue, directly reflected the demands of the peasant and tribal struggles.
- **Mobilizing the Masses for Satyagraha:** The methods of resistance developed in these movements, such as **boycotts, non-payment of taxes**, and mass mobilization, were effectively utilized and integrated into the Gandhian-led national movements like the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements.

Conclusion:

By the time India stood at the brink of freedom in 1947, **tribal and peasant movements** ensured that independence was not merely political, but also a fight for dignity, land, and livelihood. As **Mahatma Gandhi** said- "The soul of India lives in its villages." It was in those villages and forest hamlets that the true spirit of resistance was born and nurtured.