

Pre 1857 Tribal movements -1

PEASANT AND TRIBAL UPRISINGS: ORIGINS

In pre-colonial India popular protest against the Mughal rulers and their officials was not uncommon. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed many peasant uprisings against the ruling class. Imposition of a high land revenue demand by the state: corrupt practices and harsh attitude of the tax collecting officials, were some of the many reasons which provoked the peasants to rise in revolt. However, the establishment of colonial rule in India and the various policies of the colonial government had a much more devastating effect on the Indian peasants and tribes. In Block 4 we have discussed in detail how the Indian economy was transformed by the British to suit the East India Company's needs and to enlarge the profits of their own countrymen. Some of the changes in Indian economy brought during this period were:

1. Promotion of British manufactured goods in Indian markets leading to destruction of Indian handloom and handicraft industries
2. Huge transfer of wealth from India to England (Drain of Wealth).
3. British land revenue settlements, a heavy burden of new taxes, eviction of peasants from their lands, encroachment on tribal lands.
4. growth and strengthening of exploitation in rural society along with the growth of intermediary revenue collectors and tenants and money-lenders.

5. Expansion of British revenue administration over tribal territories leading to the loss of tribal people's hold over agricultural and forest land.

The overall impact of these changes on the peasant and tribal society was very destructive. The appropriation of peasants surplus by the company and its agents, the increasing burden of taxes made the peasants completely dependant on the mercy of the revenue intermediaries and officials, the merchants and the money-lenders. Moreover, the destruction of indigenous industry led to migration of large scale workers from industry to agriculture. The pressure on land increased but the land revenue and agricultural policy of the government allowed little scope for the improvement of Indian agriculture. While the British economic policy led to pauperisation and impoverishment of the Indian peasantry, the British administration turned a deaf ear to the peasants grievances. British law and judiciary did not aid the peasantry; it safeguarded the interest of the government and its collaborators-the landlords, the merchants and the money-lenders. Thus being the prey of colonial exploitation and being deprived of justice from the colonial administration the peasants took up arms to protect themselves. The grievances of the tribal people were not different from those of the peasants. But what made them more aggrieved was the encroachment by outsiders into their independent tribal polity.